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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[“DO NOT TOUCH ME! I HAVE BORNE AN ETERNITY OF TORMENT FROM YOUR CARESSES; BUT, THANK HEAVEN, THEY ARE OVER FOR EVER!”]

ROSALIND'S VOW.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER THE WEDDING.

The ceremony was over. The words had been spoken, the blessing pronounced, and Rosalind and Sir Kenneth were man and wife!

It had been a dispiriting service, gabbled over by a deaf old clergyman, who felt the church damp, and who was anxious to get home again to his more cosy study.

Beyond Edith and her father there were no guests, and a snuffy little old woman in goloshes, who uttered the responses in an audible voice, was the only other person present.

It was the first wedding Edith had ever been to, and she was inclined to be tearful at the prospect of losing the companion whom she had grown to love; inclined, also, to wonder at Rosalind's perfect self-possession, which almost amounted to indifference. She gave

her answers in a low, but firm tone, without the quivering of a muscle, and of the two, she was certainly the more composed of the bridal pair.

Edith breathed a sigh of relief when the service was over. All the while it lasted she had a curious feeling of unreality—an uncomfortable sensation of insecurity. There was something missing in the ceremony—some void that she could not explain, but which made itself felt like an actual presence.

If an interruption had come, and the wedding had had to be postponed, she would have said it was nothing more than she expected!

Even the Squire, prosaic and matter-of-fact as he was, was conscious of some jarring element, and wished he had never consented to be present.

“Decidedly the most uncomfortable wedding I ever had anything to do with,” he confided to Edith, as they followed the bride and bridegroom to the vestry, to sign their names as witnesses.

Rosalind wrote her signature with a firm, bold hand; the last time she would have the right of signing her maiden name!

“Rosalind, dear Rosalind!” exclaimed Edith, throwing her arms round the bride's neck, and bursting into a storm of sobs. “I hope—oh, I hope you will be happy!”

For the first time Rosalind was moved. Her lips quivered, her eyes became misty with tears, and it was with passionate tenderness that she clasped the younger girl to her bosom.

“My darling!” she whispered, in a tone too low to be overheard by anyone save the person to whom it was addressed. “Your love has been so much to me, to lose it would be terrible. Promise me that whatever happens—however wicked you may be told I am—you, at least, will judge me with kindness, you will always keep me in your heart, if only as a tender memory!”

“Always, always!” Edith returned, chokingly, her sobs increasing as the encircling arms drew her still closer.

“Come, come!” put in the Squire, brusquely. “This sort of thing won't do, you know; altogether the wrong thing for a wedding. Edith, my dear, control yourself. Lady Hawtrey, permit me to offer you my congratulations.”

Rosalind started violently. It was the first time she had been addressed by her new name, and the words struck upon her like an electric shock.

She pushed Edith gently away, thanked the Squire quietly for his good wishes, then turned to her husband, who was watching the scene with less pleasure than curiosity.

"I am ready," she said, and he drew her arm through his, and led her down the aisle to the carriage standing ready at the church door.

There was to be no breakfast, and it had been arranged that the newly-married pair should drive straight off to Victoria station, and go from thence to Dover, *en route* for Brussels, which was to be their first stopping place.

Edith hastened to the church porch to see them go off, and then became aware that she had forgotten the basket of rice and satin shoes, which she had intended throwing after them for "good luck." Our little Edith, as the reader already knows, was very superstitious!

"Bother the rice and slippers!" irritably exclaimed the Squire, who was in a bad temper. "What the deuce do they want with such rubbish?"

"Everybody has it, papa. It is the rule."

"Then it is a very foolish rule, and the offence it's broken the better! I'll have nothing of the sort when you are married, let me tell you."

Edith smiled a little wistfully. Her own marriage seemed a very far-off possibility—so far off that the mists of distance quite obscured it.

Meanwhile, the newly-married pair were being borne swiftly along the deserted streets in the direction of Victoria station.

Rosalind had shrunk back into her corner of the carriage, and neither spoke nor moved. She looked even whiter than usual, and her pallor had lost that creamy warmth which usually characterised it.

Sir Kenneth glanced at her rather anxiously. There was something in her demeanour that he could not understand—an undefinable antagonism, too subtle to be analysed, which made itself felt like a cold spell.

"Aren't you well?" he said, presently, taking her hand—her manner repelled him from any warmer caress. "Or has the excitement unnerved you?"

There was a flush of something that looked like scorn in her eyes. She waited a moment before she answered, so as to gain time for controlling her voice, which might otherwise have betrayed more than she wished it to.

"I am quite well, thank you; but I am hesitating as to the way I should put a request I want to make of you."

"Hesitating! Surely," his voice was full of tenderness, as he drew a little nearer, "you need have no hesitation in making a request that you know quite well will be granted!"

"Well, then, instead of taking the train for Dover, I want you to come with me to Aston, in Kent. It is my old home, and I am anxious for you to see it. Will you come?"

"Assuredly, dearest! It is a very small thing to ask."

"Only that it upsets your plans."

"My plans are all made with a view to your pleasure," he said, with a touch of reproach in his voice; "and if it pleases you to alter them, you have only to say so. I don't think you quite understand my love for you, Rosalind—it is the one great passion of my life which absorbs everything else."

"I suppose all men tell their wives that on their wedding-day," she returned, with a cynical curl of her lip.

He drew back, as if hurt.

"Why do you say such things, and why do you class me with 'all men'?" Surely, you credit me with speaking the truth?"

"Yes. No doubt you believe what you say at the present moment. Perhaps in a year or two you may think and speak very differently. You see, you don't know me thoroughly yet."

Her words came upon him with a little shock.

Was it true that "he did not know her?" Might she develop a nature totally different to the ideal with which he had invested her?

Sir Kenneth felt his heart growing chill, then he resolutely banished such fears, as treachery to his new-made bride. She was, although she would not confess it, excited and overwrought, and therefore not quite responsible for her words. He would not tease her with questions or caresses just yet, but leave her alone until she had recovered her calmness—then she would be herself again.

Her wish that he should see her former home pleased him, since it argued a clinging to old memories in which she desired him to share. They could go down to Aston and back in three or four hours, and on their return there would still be time to catch the night mail for Dover, so that the delay in reaching Brussels would be a very trivial one.

Luckily they caught a train which stopped at Aston, and on alighting at the little village station Sir Kenneth was about to order a carriage, when Rosalind prevented him.

"It is not so very far—we can walk it in very little time."

He yielded to her, but not without remonstrance, for a small fine rain was beginning to fall, and he feared lest she should get wet. She laughed contemptuously, and put on her waterproof.

"I am not a fragile little creature whom a breath would blow away," she said, as they left the station; "and I am quite unused to being taken care of."

"You will have to get accustomed to it, then, for I shall take very great care of you, indeed," he answered, with a bright smile, offering her his arm. "You will be to me a gem beyond price, and I shall treasure you accordingly."

She did not reply, but took his arm and walked on in unbroken silence. Once or twice Kenneth made an observation, but she took no notice of it—in effect. She seemed in a condition of strained self-absorption, that left her no time for consideration of outward things.

That she was the prey of powerful emotion was clear. Her lips twitched, not with nervousness, but with still deeper agitation, and every now and again a long shiver ran through her veins, causing every limb to vibrate.

The farther they went on, the lonelier became the road, and the more miserable the weather.

A good honest downpour of rain would not have been half so bad as this fine, penetrating drizzle, which wrapped everything near in a damp mist, and obscured everything far off in a wet cloud.

Rosalind, in her long black waterproof and close-fitting bonnet, did not seem to mind it. But Sir Kenneth, who had not even the protection of a summer overcoat, was gradually getting wet to the skin.

"Is it much farther?" he asked, presently, with a little uneasiness, for they had already come some distance, and still there were no houses in sight.

She pointed to a plantation of trees on in front, about a quarter of a mile distant.

"It will not take us long now," she said, and then relapsed again into silence, while Sir Kenneth felt himself growing unaccountably depressed, under the influence of his surroundings.

It was a strange way of spending his wedding-day, tramping along a lonely country road in the drizzling rain by the side of a mute bride.

The drops of moisture hung pendant from each leaf and twig in the hedges; some frogs in a field on the other side croaked dismally; and still farther off a corn-crake was uttering his melancholy cry.

Sir Kenneth began to wish he had not yielded to his wife's request.

However, it was too late to go back now,

and the only alternative was to hurry on as fast as possible, so as to return to London all the sooner.

He quickened his pace a little, and before long they had entered the plantation of trees Rosalind had indicated.

"Surely the house cannot be *here*?" the Baronet exclaimed; and his wife returned coldly,—

"No. But it is not to the houses I am bringing you."

"Where then?"

"You will see presently."

He looked at her with some apprehension, and a vague fear that her brain had become clouded flashed across his mind.

But there was no sign of madness in the dark, beautiful face, calm and statuesque as if it had been cut in marble; no sign of wandering intellect in the steadfast expression of the luminous eyes.

However strange Rosalind's conduct might be it was the result of a preconceived plan, not a sudden bewilderment of brain.

Once in the shadow of the trees the young wife withdrew her arm from her husband's and walked before him, so as to lead the way.

Headless of the long, dark grass, the spreading brambles, the gnarled roots of the trees, she went on, until they came to the side of a pool, where tall rushes were growing, and green islands of duckweed floated in shiny patches on the water.

A more dismal place it would be impossible to conceive. Shut in on all sides by the trees, so little light penetrated that even in bright sunshine a twilight dimness always reigned; but under these leaden August skies it was positively dark, and the rank growth of vegetation helped to make the air moist and heavy.

Rosalind paused by the side of the pond and pointed with one finger to a small wooden cross at her feet; and then Sir Kenneth was enabled to discern a vague outline of slightly raised grass in the shape of a grave.

"What is this?—what does it all mean?" he asked, in a bewildered voice, turning to her; and her answer came back in cold hard tones, from which all the youth and music had departed.—

"This is the grave of my sister, Mara. She chose it herself as her resting place before she committed the crime that forbade her being laid in consecrated ground."

"What!" Sir Kenneth started violently.

"You mean—you mean—"

"That she committed suicide! Yes, that is what I do mean! And it is to tell you why, that I have brought you here."

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR EVER AND FOR EVER.

HUSBAND and wife faced each other, and it would have been difficult to say which looked the sterner and whiter of the two.

Rosalind had thrown back her veil, her slim figure was drawn up to its fullest height, one hand still pointed to the wooden cross, while the other was held forcibly against her beating heart.

She might have been an accusing angel, but for the passionate resentment that shone in her stormy eyes.

As for Sir Kenneth, conscious that a crisis in his life was close at hand, he gathered all his resolution to meet it. That Rosalind was the prey of some terrible hallucination he fully believed; but how it would declare itself he was unable to guess.

"You say you have brought me here to tell me why your sister committed suicide!" he said, constraining himself by a great effort to remain calm. "I do not see what necessity there was to choose this day of all others, on which to make your disclosure; but, doubtless, you will enlighten my ignorance."

"Does not your conscience tell you?" she exclaimed, sternly. "Or is it so dead that not even a just retribution can shake it?"

"Conscience—retribution! I do not understand you!"

"You have forgotten! Great heavens!" cried Rosalind, throwing out her two hands, in a gesture of passionate entreaty. "Is it possible that a man can be so utterly heartless, so vile?"

The violence of her own emotion stopped her. Trembling like an aspen in a light wind, she leaned against the trunk of a tree, as if to support herself; but when Kenneth—oblivious for the moment of everything but his love—would have come forward to offer her assistance, she waved him back frantically.

"Do not come near me—do not touch me! I have borne an eternity of torment from your caresses; but, thank Heaven, they are over now—for ever! At last I can tell the truth—at last I can fling the hateful mask of deceit aside, and show myself to you as I am—the Nemesis of your sin!"

She was transformed by her passion. That lovely carmine flush which only stained her cheeks under the stress of some unwanted feelings blazed there now in its deepest carnation; her eyes were like two burning stars.

Sir Kenneth was absolutely petrified by surprise. He could only stand, and wait for her to go on, and this she did directly she recovered her breath.

"You need to be told who my sister was! Well, her name was Marquita de Belvoir. Ah! you start! Now, surely you remember her!"

"Yes," returned the Baronet, in an altered voice, "I remember her—poor girl!"

"You pity her? That is kind of you—very kind, considering that it was you who made her an object of pity," Rosalind said, satirically. "However, we will let that pass. I wish to recall to you her history. Perhaps you have heard it before, but the lapse of years may have dulled its freshness.

"When she was twenty-one—that is exactly eight years ago—she went to Kings Royal as companion to your mother, and she occupied the little room in which you found me on your return to your home last June. Strange that our meeting should have taken place there, was it not? The rooms were just as she left them—I knew it because she had described them to me over and over again—told me where each article of furniture was placed—what the pattern was of the chintz that covered the chairs even.

"Well, when she had been at Kings Royal twelve months, you came back from the Continent, where you had been travelling, and fell in love with her—or rather, pretended to fall in love with her. Her affection for you was, alas! but too real. She loved you with her whole heart and soul. She would have laid down her life for you, if by doing so she could have contributed to your happiness! You not only made love to her, but you asked her to be your wife, and a few weeks afterwards, through some little petty quarrel, you left the house, and went to London.

"From there you wrote her a letter breaking off your engagement, and she, half mad in her despair, came back to the little home where I and my aunt were living, and never saw you again. At that time I was sixteen, and although Marquita and I were only half-sisters, I worshipped her with as absolute a devotion as I was capable of.

"She was so beautiful, so good, and her kindness to me can never be expressed. When my parents died I was left without a penny in the world, and it was Marquita who went out to work, and gained—not only her own livelihood, but mine as well. The old aunt who lived with us had a small annuity—barely sufficient for herself, so she had nothing to spare for me; and if it had not been for my sister's devotion there would have been no resource for me but the workhouse.

"You may imagine, how I loved her! And you may imagine, too, how I felt when I saw the awful change wrought in her by her absence at Kings Royal! She was pale, listless, dispirited. Nothing seemed to rouse

her, nothing to interest her; and at last one day she disappeared, and her body was found in this pond!"

Rosalind ceased for a moment, and covered her face with her hands. Sir Kenneth, who had been listening with bent head, did not raise his eyes, but his lips had set themselves together in a rigid line of intense pain.

"There could be no doubt as to her intention to commit suicide, for upon her dead body was found a note, requesting that she might be buried here"—the speaker's eyes dwelt for a moment on the wooden cross—"and also reminding me of my promise. Shall I tell you what that promise was, Sir Kenneth? Months before her death, she had confided to me her miserable love-story, and made me vow that, if it ever lay in my power I would avenge her wrongs. I was very young then, not seventeen, in fact; but the tragedy of my sister's life and death made a woman of me. All my energies were concentrated on the fulfilment of the vow I had made, and I resolved that, no matter how long I might have to wait, I would never be satisfied until I had brought retribution on Marquita's murderer. Soon after my sister's death my aunt also died, and I went into a school, first as pupil teacher, and finally as a governess. But even then I contrived to find out a good deal about you, and I learned that your mother was dead, and you were abroad. Then I left the school, and took a situation as governess to the children of a widow lady in London, and while I was there a strange chance brought a girl from Crowthorne village as housemaid to my employer. She had been a protege of Miss Charlton's, and she knew there was a rumour that when you returned from abroad you would probably marry Miss Charlton.

"I also learned from her that there was some talk of the young lady having a companion—for this housemaid had been at Crowthorne Manor for some time, and knew all the gossip of the place. Then, my mind was made up, and I resolved to go to Crowthorne, and there await your coming. By what means I effected this I need not tell you; but when I got there one obstacle interposed itself for which I had not made due provision. I mean Edith herself. She was so sweet and gentle that I grew to love her as I loved no one else in the world, and if she had really cared for you, I should have gone away, my vengeance unfulfilled.

"But she did not, and so I resolved to marry you myself. I was beautiful," she said this with no vanity, but with a certain cold scorn that told how little value she placed on her own loveliness, "more beautiful than Edith, and I knew how readily men's fancies were caught by appearances. I felt I could make you in love with me, and events proved me right. Have you followed my story?"

The Baronet raised his head for the first time.

"Yes, I have followed it; but even now I hardly understand why you should have sacrificed yourself in order to marry me!" he said, very quietly.

"Then I will explain. This day you and I part for ever. We shall never meet—never speak or write to each other. You will have a wife who is no wife—a woman who despises you from the bottom of her heart, and yet has the right to bear your name—but the tie that binds you to her is one that cannot be broken! She is your wife, and so long as she lives, it will be beyond your power to marry again. You will never see an heir to your long lines of ancestors—to your title and estates—and the noble name, of which you are so proud, will die out with you!"

Sir Kenneth held up his hand with a quick gesture that entranced silence. It seemed to him that he must have time to think over this terrible revelation in order to understand it. And yet it was clear enough. She had married him, not because she loved him, but in

order to wreak, what she deemed to be, a just vengeance. Joined together, as they were, by the closest and holiest tie humanity knows, they were yet separated by a gulf that could never be spanned!

He groaned aloud, but though she heard this expression of his misery forcibly wrung from him by his terrible position, it did not move her one iota. She had dwelt no long on this retribution, thought of it by day, dreamed of it by night, until it had grown to be a very part of herself. Her whole life had become so wrapt up in it that it had distorted her vision, and even taken from her the power of discriminating between right and wrong.

To that divine command which says: "Vengeance is mine, and I will repay," she had wilfully shut her ears. She did not see that in thus trying to avenge a sin she was, in reality, committing one!

"Rosalind!" said the Baronet, presently, in the same low, restrained voice, in which he had before spoken. "Will you now listen to my version of my engagement to your sister? Remember, there are two sides to every story."

"Not to me! The facts themselves are sufficient, and if I wanted further confirmation of them I should find it there," pointing to the cross that marked the poor suicide's last resting-place.

"Then you deny me the privilege which is granted to the basest of criminals? You condemn me unheard!"

"No. I condemn you on her evidence!"

"May she not have been mistaken? Mind, I do not mean to insinuate that she told a wilful lie; but she was passionate, and hot-headed, and, perhaps—"

"I will not hear you say a word against her!" Rosalind cried, vehemently. "She was all that was good and noble, and you killed her by your baseness. Yes, murdered her as foully as if you had stabbed her to the heart with a dagger!"

"This is your final decision?"

"Yes; final and irrevocable."

"Even if it had been as you said, and I had deeply repented, would your answer still be the same?"

"It would."

"No atonement would be possible?"

"None. Could atonement bring her back to me? Could it wipe the stain off her memory as she lies in her dishonoured grave? Could it give me back my girlhood, which died with her? Never, never, never!"

Sobbing in a very passion of anguish, Rosalind threw herself down on the grass, bowing her head on the wooden cross, while scalding tears fell from her eyes and dripped on her clasped hands.

It was a pitiful sight. The beautiful, miserable creature clinging to that nameless grave, dedicating herself anew to the awful task of vengeance that had blighted so many years of her young life.

The raindrops from the trees above fell on her uncovered head, the damp weeds and grasses soaked her garments; but she was unconscious of everything save her own reckless passion.

The man who loved her watched her for a few moments in mournful silence. What could he do, what could he say? Entreaties and persuasions would be alike useless in her present frame of mind—nay, they would only aggravate the situation.

Still he could not let her stay there, in the gloom and desolation of this wretched place. He must, at least, make one effort to induce her to go away.

"Do you know you will catch your death of cold if you remain here any longer?" he said, trying to make his voice dry and commonplace.

His remonstrance had its effect. She sprang up at once with a miserable laugh.

"You are right, and I thank you for the suggestion. I have no intention of dying. I am young and strong, and I hope to live for many years yet." Then, with a sudden change of

tone, "Why do you not leave me? I have said to you all I wish to say, and now my one hope is, that I may never see you again!"

" You have told me that before," he rejoined, very sadly, " and I have no alternative but to believe you are speaking the truth. But ere the final step is taken in this most miserable business, let me say a few words. Let me ask you if you have fully considered what you are doing, if you remember that on your action now depends the future of two lives—yours and mine. For, understand this, Rosalind. Your decision, whatever it may be, so far as I am concerned, is *irrevocable*. Nothing that you may do or say later on will induce me to rescind it! The choice is yours now; after to-day it will be no longer!"

The tone, more than the words themselves, had some effect on her. They forced her to look at the position from a different point of view; and as she saw him standing before her, his dark eyes full of unutterable sadness, the natural dignity of his face rendered all the more striking by its stern expression, it flashed across her that she was indeed ruining a noble life; and more than that, she was, as he had said, condemning him unheard.

Could it be possible that what he might be able to say would palliate his offence, would prove that during all these years she had been under a delusion?

No! she could not believe it—she would not. She would wilfully shut her ears rather than doubt that her dead sister had spoken truthfully!

" It is my wish that our parting should be absolutely final," she said, defiantly. " Believe me, neither now or at any future time, shall I swerve from that desire."

" Then I have never been deceived in man or woman as I have been deceived in you! I thought you were good, pure, and noble—capricious and passionate, if you will, but for all that, true at heart. I confess my self mistaken. You are a woman, whose head-long pride and reckless passion causes you to trample under foot every good and feminine instinct, who hesitates at no wrong, but is content to outrage all that is best and holiest in humanity, in order to carry out a plan of deliberate, cold-blooded cruelty, such as few women would ever have conceived."

Sir Kenneth's voice rose a little as he continued speaking, and carefully as he tried to restrain his righteous indignation, it rung out in the clarion tones of his voice like the denunciation of an accusing angel.

" It is true I loved you—loved you as few men have the power of loving; but it is equally true that now I find out your real character, I shall crush that love from my heart as I should crush a noisome reptile under foot. In effect, it was not you I cared for, it was an ideal woman, whom I saw in your form, and who existed merely in my imagination; but now that dream is dead, and I am a free man again."

" Not free!" she reminded him, with a bitter sneer. " Never free so long as this ring remains on my finger," holding out the slim white hand, whose only ornament was the broad band of gold he had placed there that morning.

That morning! Why it seemed *days* ago—weeks—months even. In these few hours he had gone through an eternity of pain!

" You need not to remind me of my bondage," he returned, with a glance of scathing contempt, " any more than I need to remind you that the ring is also the sign of your own sin. Yes; you are my wife, and though perhaps the law might release me from you, I shall make no appeal to it. I have lived in a Fool's Paradise, and I must take the consequences. Neither shall I, as I legally might, force you to return to me, for I need hardly tell you that after this revelation I would go to the uttermost ends of the earth in order to avoid you. You have not only deceived me more cruelly than man was ever deceived before, but you have done still worse—you have destroyed my faith in humanity."

itself. How can I believe there are good and noble women in the world when you, whom I thought to be the noblest and the best, have thus deliberately set yourself to compass my misery?"

" I have only wrought a just retribution," Rosalind answered; but her voice was less assured than it had been, and horrible fears were beginning to assail her as to whether she had been justified in what she had done. Resolutely she stilled them in their birth. If she had been wrong the time for repentance was past, and all that was left for her to do was to end a scene fraught with the most bitter anguish for both. " I have said to you all I have to say, and now we will part—for ever!"

" For ever!" he echoed, and without another word he walked away, and she was left alone in the gloom and silence of the pine trees—a solitary figure, with bent head and white lips, whose eyes rested despairingly on the wooden cross above Marquita's grave.

CHAPTER IX.

A DECLARATION.

CROWTHORNE seemed very dull to Edith during the first few days after her return from London. There had been so much excitement in the preparations for the wedding that the reaction was necessarily great; and, besides this, Edith was deeply disappointed that Rosalind did not answer her letter. Not a line came either from bride or bridegroom, though both had intimated they would write directly they got to Brussels—and they were to arrive there the day after their marriage.

" Too much wrapped up in each others' society to think of anybody else," chuckled the Squire; but Edith was not quite so sure of this.

A foreboding, which she could not get rid of, warned her that something was wrong, although, what that "something" was, she could not even guess.

One morning, about a week after the wedding, she and Monk went for a walk in the grounds, and without thinking much where she was going, the young girl strayed into a little forest of trees that divided her father's lands from those attached to the Cedars.

It was a lovely August morning, with just a breath of very early autumn in the air; the hedges were ablaze with scarlet-berried briony; the brambles were covered with blackberries in various stages of ripeness, and the leaves were beginning to show yellow at the edges.

In the little wood an intense silence reigned, broken only by the low cooing of the ring-dove to her mate—a sound which, if musical, is certainly very melancholy!

Edith stopped for a moment to listen to it, and at the same time became aware of the presence of a man, who was seated on a camp-stool a short distance away.

Before him was placed an easel and canvas, but he was not sketching; indeed, he seemed lost in profoundest thought, for his head was buried in his two hands, and his whole attitude bespoke extreme despondency.

Edith's heart began to beat rapidly, for she had immediately recognised him as Claud Stuart.

Strangely enough he raised his head and looked straight at her—it almost seemed as if there had been some magic in her gaze which had compelled him to meet her eyes.

Edith was not a vain girl, but she would have been blind if she had not noticed the glad smile that irradiated his face as he saw her, changing it as completely as a gleam of sunshine changes a wintry landscape.

He sprang up and came forward to greet her, and he certainly held her hand in his longer than there was any strict necessity for doing.

" It is ages since I saw you!" he said, looking down into her fair, winsome face. " Where have you been all this long time?"

" Where have you been?" returned the young girl, laughing. " How is it you never come to see us now?"

The question seemed to embarrass him, for he grew red, and half turned away.

" I must not wear out my welcome at Crowthorne by too constant visits," he said at last.

" You are careful to run no risk of that kind," Edith remarked, rather drily. Then she added softly, " You ought to know that my father is always pleased to see you."

" And you?"

He tried hard not to put the question, but it came from him in spite of himself.

Edith's colour deepened, and the long, thick lashes that added so much to her beauty brushed the downy softness of her cheek. There was no need to say anything, when her manner told so much.

Poor Claud! He had exercised so much constraint over himself—he had kept away from the Manor so as to put himself beyond the reach of temptation; and just when he was congratulating himself on having partly mastered his passion, Fate must needs throw Edith again in his way; and in addition to convincing him that he loved her as dearly as ever, must hint as well that she was not indifferent to him.

The temptation was too strong for him. Prudence—restraint—everything vanished, and he caught her in his arms and drew her close to him, whispering the while passionate vows of love, so incoherently worded that no one save a sympathetic listener would have been able to make out their meaning.

But Edith was a sympathetic listener; and, more than that, she was a very happy one, for those hasty, passionately-uttered sentences had the same magic in them as a key which unlocks the golden gates of Elysium, and shows beyond, wonderful vistas of unending brightness.

She said no word of rebuke or remonstrance, but suffered him to hold her in a close embrace; and as her face lay against his breast she could hear the quick, strong beats of his heart, and it seemed to her that her own was throbbing equally fast.

For a few minutes neither spoke; both were drinking deep of that nectar which it is given us only once in our lives to taste, and happiness is too subtle and delicate a quality to translate itself into language.

When the deepest joy or the saddest misery comes to us we are equally silent; words will not express one tithe of what we feel.

And the doves cooed on, and the leaves murmured together in gentle whisperings, and the noisy little brook in the distance babbled to the stones that lay in its way, and then the clock at the Manor struck, and Edith started away from her lover, as if the sound had recalled her to consciousness.

" Dearest," he said, very gently, laying his hand on her arm, " you do not regret confessing that you loved me?"

" Regret it! Oh, no, Claud. I was thinking of my father."

The young man's face clouded. He seemed to hesitate a moment, as if confused; then he took her arm, and drew her towards a fallen trunk of a tree on which they both sat down.

" Your father!" he repeated. " Do you think he will object to your becoming engaged to me?"

" I don't know. There is no reason why he should," Edith responded in a troubled tone. " Still—"

" You think it possible?"

" Yes," she said; then with an effort, she continued, " You see, he will say he does not know much about you—"

" I see! I see!" returned the young man, hastily, while his brow grew clouded. " And he will say rightly. Edith, I had no business to tell you I loved you, for a cruel fate prevents my going to your father, as I ought to do, and asking his permission to marry you! I had resolved to keep my love a secret, even from you, but—" he groaned, and hid his face in his hands, without completing his sentence.

Edith grew a little paler. This seemed strange conduct on the part of an accepted lover, and she did not understand it; nevertheless, it did not strike her to doubt him, much less to think of blaming him.

"Why should you have wished me to remain in ignorance of your affection?" she asked, softly, after a little pause.

"That I cannot tell you, for it would involve the betrayal of a secret that I am pledged not to reveal. This is a strange wooing, is it not, my darling?" he said, with a melancholy smile, raising his head, and looking down into the troubled depths of her azure eyes. "All I can do is to ask you to trust me, and to believe that, whatever may have been in the past, whatever may be in the future, I love you with my whole heart and soul!"

"I do believe it, Claud!" she answered, impulsively; "and I will trust you!"

He threw his arm round her waist, and once more kissed the pretty lips.

"My own sweetheart! The time will come when your love and trust will be justified; but, meanwhile, our engagement must remain a secret from the whole world!"

"Except from my father, Claud. Oh! you will surely let me tell my father?"

"It is him more than anyone else that I fear! No, Edith, you must not breathe a word of this to the Squire, for he would very naturally ask why I did not come forward and claim you before the whole world, as I would to Heaven I could!"

Edith could not deny this, and yet it seemed to her a dreadful thing that she should engage herself without her father's consent, without even his knowledge. Conscience whispered, too, that it was wrong in itself, as well as un-dutiful.

Claud seemed to guess the mental battle that was going on in her heart, for he took her hand, and said very earnestly,—

"I am giving you a hard task, Edith, and it is one that nothing save direst necessity should make me propose. There is only one alternative. Either you accept it, or—Oh!" he exclaimed, breaking off, "I cannot give you up! I cannot! I cannot! Life without you would be one long, weary pain; and death itself would be preferable!"

And, indeed, it seemed to him that what he said was literally true, and that it would be impossible to exist without the love which, now that it had broken through the restraint his will had set upon it, rushed tumultuously along, threatening to sweep away every obstacle that came in its path.

As for scruples, he put them on one side, saying to himself that, if he did evil, it was only in order that good might come. Anything was better than to run the risk of losing her!

"Believe me, darling," he said, "I would not urge this secrecy if there were not very powerful reasons why I should do so. It is as repugnant to me as it is to you; and I acknowledge that we shall not be acting well towards your father. But what can I do? I am not my own master, but the victim of a terrible hard fate!"

Yes, the fate was a hard one, but never had it seemed so hard as it did at this moment, when it threatened to separate him from the girl he loved!

What need is there to go over the many arguments he used to persuade her? Plausible as they were in themselves, they were rendered far more powerful by the fact that his was the voice that urged them. Remember, Edith was very young, and had been a spoilt child from her youth up. Whatever she had wanted, she had had, and now her moral courage was not great enough to withstand the strain imposed upon it. At last she yielded, and promised to keep her brotherhood secret from everyone.

"But surely," she said, when she had given this promise, "you will tell me the reason why you cannot claim me openly?"

It was hard to withstand the sweet pleading of her eyes as she raised them to his.

Claud turned his own away, lest he should be tempted to yield to her entreaty.

"My darling, I cannot—do not ask me. There! let us drop the subject, and talk of something more pleasant. You are the sweetest, truest love man ever had, and it shall be my constant endeavour to make myself worthy of you, and the faith you have put in me."

And then they drifted off again into love's Elysium, and again the distant striking of the stable clock—this time it only boomed forth one stroke—roused them.

"I must go," Edith said, rising reluctantly. "It is luncheon time, and I shall have to run all the way back to the Manor so as to keep daddy waiting."

"Nevertheless, another ten minutes was spent in saying good-bye, and Edith's cheeks rivalled the rose in brightness, as she flew back through the park, and hurried into the Manor by a side door.

"Dear me!" said the Squire, testily, as she entered the dining-room, where he was pacing up and down in the vain effort to work himself into a passion. "How late you are! Where on earth have you been to?"

"So sorry, daddy, dear," murmured Edith, going up to him and kissing him—she fancied she understood now what Judas's feelings must have been as he gave his kiss! "I won't be naughty anymore. It is such a fine morning—and—somehow the time slipped away. I did not know it was so late!"

"I wonder the state of your stomach did not tell you. Mine has been in want of its lunch this half-hour," growled the Squire, with a last endeavour to be bad-tempered. "Well, well," as he sat down and proceeded with the congenial task of dissecting a fine cold grouse, "perhaps I shall be able to make up for lost time now. Let me give you a nice piece of breast."

But Edith was much too excited to feel the cravings of hunger and she only trifled with the cold game, while her memory went back to the memorable events of the morning.

She was aroused from her reverie by the voice of the Squire, who spoke with his mouth full.

"I suppose you have remembered that Fulke Marchant is coming to-day? His room is ready, I hope?"

This was put in the form of a question. Edith started guiltily. She had forgotten not only the fact of a visitor being expected, but the very existence of that visitor.

"There!" exclaimed her father with a sort of desperate resignation in his tone, "this is what comes of letting you be housekeeper. Now, if Rosalind Grant, I beg her pardon, Lady Hawtrey! had been here, everything would have been in readiness. You'll never make such a housewife as she was, Edith."

"Yes, I shall, papa, some day!" returned the girl, brightly. "And as for Mr. Marchant—why, I'll go this very minute and see that his room is prepared."

"Stay, finish your luncheon!" called out the Squire, as she got up and ran from the table, but she either did not hear or did not heed the warning, and the Squire shook his head with solemn disgust. "Ah, young people! young people!" he murmured, as he re-addressed himself to the grouse on his plate, "they have no idea of the more serious duties of life—they care nothing about their meals!"

Edith, however, was making up for lost time by giving vigorous directions to the servants; and long before the expected guest arrived the chamber was ready and decorated with flowers by the young girl's own hand.

If a glimpse into the future could have been permitted her, Captain Fulke Marchant's visit would certainly not have been welcomed by roses!

(To be continued.)

Hx that hath climbed the rocks can alone tell you the secrets of the rough ascent.

MY LADY OF THE LAKE.

—:-:

CHAPTER XL.—(continued.)

FORTUNATELY for his peace, the doctor discovered that if he meant to catch his train he must start for the station, and the pony-carriage was ordered all in a hurry to convey him there.

Great man though he was, he did his best to "pump" Thomas by the way; but Thomas was as true as steel; when he could see someone at the handle the pump was dry. But poor old Thomas was scarcely a match for the clever man of the world, and the London doctor got into the train with the information that although Sir Roger Dalkeith kept no company and was seldom away from home, yet that artists did occasionally wander in this picturesque neighbourhood, and that old Thomas was very much down upon everyone of the artistic profession!

This was an admission!

The doctor could always make two and two count four, and upon occasions he could stretch them to five!

In the present instance his interest in the affair was growing. A beautiful invalid and a wandering artist in conjunction with a proud and stern father like Sir Roger Dalkeith! Why, he could readily see the working of a romantic plot!

But it must be confessed that that which the doctor drew, came far short of the reality.

May's wedding-ring was under lock and key with her marriage certificate, and the great authority never dreamed that the young girl he had been attending was even in name a wife.

So, after all, although he scented a lover in the artist, notwithstanding all which the Baronet had said, he was a long way from guessing the truth.

"What can he expect!" soliloquised the wise doctor, as he settled himself for a nap upon the comfortable cushions of the up express. "People can't go against nature, and it is utterly unnatural to make a recluse of a lovely young girl like that!"

At Southmore the door was somewhat abruptly pushed open by a young clergyman with a golden moustache.

He unclosed his eyes and looked at him through narrowed lids. On the whole, he did not admire him well enough to give up his sleep to enter into conversation with him.

In fact, parsons—especially young ones—were not much in the doctor's line. As for the golden-moustached cleric, he was unaware that he was travelling with a man of note, or he would have tried to improve the occasion, for he was not one to lose the faintest opportunity, and he could suit his conversation equally well to the wiseacres of the world as to the foolish; although it must be confessed that Mr. Andrews, for he it was, vastly preferred the foolish.

Upon the present occasion he was perhaps not much in the mood for conversation, for he was in want of money, and was on his way to London to find Mr. Guy Forrester, his artistic cousin, to obtain it from him, for he felt fully assured that he would not dare refuse it to him; and he smiled as he thought of his power over his cousin and his astonishment at seeing him walk in. Moreover, he anticipated making friends with the beautiful young woman whom he had made his wife in the old church of St. Clement's at Southmore.

He was a clergyman and Guy Forrester's cousin, and of course he would have every regard for Mrs. Guy's peace of mind; but he certainly would like to count the pretty creature among his friends, and Gerald Andrews stroked the fair moustache, which he seemed never tired of caressing, with quite an affectionate touch, as though he owed something to its beauty in the satisfactory manner in

which he carried out these little *affaires de cœur!*"

Certainly neither the parson nor the doctor would have remained silent through that journey had either guessed the thoughts which were passing in the mind of the other; and how much of interest each could have told about that romantic affair, at which the one only guessed, while the other knew some serious facts, which stood out in bold relief before his mind's eye; but he lacked all the smaller details to blend it into a complete picture as he would have liked to do.

He might have helped the doctor, and the doctor might have assisted him!

But, as has before been said, they did not care for the look of each other, so they travelled on in silence, the great medico occasionally touching the crisp bank-note which Sir Roger had placed in his hand at parting, which he had slipped into his pocket, as if it were a thing of no moment whatever—just a visiting card, or an item of memoranda, to be looked at and commented on another time.

Such insignificant trifles had made the physician a rich man, whereas the parson was at that moment a poor one, inasmuch as he had, to use a common expression, "outrun his constable!"

This being the case he was in search of some of those insignificant trifles at the hands, and out of the pockets of, the cousin who was in his power. And so the world jogs on wheel within wheel, in the strange complicated mesh which we call life!

CHAPTER XLII.

A FRUITLESS JOURNEY.

LORD RANGOR arrived very unexpectedly in London. All his English friends and acquaintances believed him to be somewhere the other side of the globe—they had no clear idea where, and his sudden appearance among them caused quite a little excitement of whys and whereabouts on the subject of his return.

He walked into his club as though nothing had happened, and he had been there the day before, and every day for the past twelve months.

Things looked much the same as they had done before he left. There were a few new faces, and he missed some old ones, for time does not stand still.

Every one he knew, was eager to hear what he had been doing with himself, and where he had been, and all had news of various sorts to relate; but it did not interest him much, until some one brought up a subject which was near his heart.

An old Indian officer, very yellow in the complexion, came into the club with a grumble on his lips. He was suffering from liver complaint, and it was a bad day with him.

He had been to his doctor's, and found that he was out of town, having been telegraphed for to go down to a Sir Roger Dalkeith, in Farnshire.

That was all the irascible old Bengal tiger had been able to ascertain from the suave and polished butler who had opened the door for him at the well-known house of the eminent physician.

"Who the deuce is Sir Roger Dalkeith?" he queried, crossly, as though that gentleman's very existence were an annoyance to him.

"Lord Ranger can answer that question better than any one present," laughed one of his friends, "for he is his landlord. Allow me to introduce you to his lordship."

"Very happy, I'm sure!" grunted the old Indian, although he did not look delighted at all.

"I hope your tenant won't detain my doctor long, my lord. What is wrong with him? For his sake I trust it is not his liver; but in England we hear that everything is *drainage*. As the house he lives in is yours, let us hope there is nothing of that sort wrong, for when

you begin to go in for sanitation and modern improvements and all that class of thing you want a purse as long as the proverbial sea-serpent. No ascertained length ever seems long enough to satisfy every one."

Suffering makes folks selfish, and the only serious thought of the speaker was anxiety for the coming back of his medical attendant. Lord Ranger regarded him with interest.

"Is it Sir Roger himself who is ill?" he inquired, anxiously.

"Egad, sir! You know as much about it as I do, and you have the information cheaper than I obtained it; for it cost me half-a-crown to get even so much out of the servant!"

"You should offer Ranger double or quits upon your outlay," laughed one of the club "wags," while another quietly chimed in,—

"Half-a-crown! Why, my dear fellow, you're accustomed to native servants! It is a wonder the doctor's butler did not resent the slight. Those gentlemen of the quiet foot-steps expect gold!"

"Do they?" growled he of the liver and yellow face. "Well, they won't get it from me!"

"I can well believe that," laughed a saucy youngster who considered the other had fleeced him over "whist" the night before.

"Well, he pocketed it sharp enough," said the old Indian.

"Ah!" retorted the other, wickedly. "No doubt he saw that it would have been a forlorn hope to try and get more. No doubt he had heard the old saying, 'you cannot draw blood from a stone!'"

A lion-like growl from the old soldier was greeted with a laugh by the bystanders.

"Come, youngster, that is enough," said Lord Ranger, with a good-natured slap on his back. "Go and play at leap-frog with some of the boys, and leave your seniors to talk seriously," and turning to the irate Indian officer he begged for all the information he could give him, which really amounted to little more than he had heard already; and after dining at the club, Lord Ranger went home, having resisted all attempts to persuade him to join in a game of cards.

One of the first things he did upon reaching his home was to ask where the picture of "My Lady of the Lake" had been taken to, and finding that it was in the library awaiting his instructions as to where it should be hung, he ordered the gas to be lighted there; and entering the room he stood before the picture, gazing intently at the beautiful face and figure of the daughter of the woman whose image he had so long cherished in his heart. And as he gazed, he told himself that she was even more lovely than her mother—the face softer, more rounded, and fairer; the eyes bluer and more loving; the whole more completely, more bewilderingly beautiful than any girl he had ever seen before.

May Dalkeith was precisely the style of beauty which suited his taste, although it was scarcely voluptuous enough for the fancy of the Bohemian artist, Guy Forrester. After a prolonged survey, the Earl turned away.

"If I could only re-unite those two," he murmured, "what happiness I should confer upon them both! I will try my utmost to do it. Mrs. Roslyn shall never have cause to think I have forgotten my promise to her, and there is no time like the present. If Sir Roger is really ill, I may find it easier to see his daughter, and, at any rate, I will go down to-morrow and do my best."

That night Lord Ranger's sleep was disturbed by dreams. He found it hard to tell whose face it was which haunted him; it might be that of the girl in the punt upon the lake of St. Ormo, or it might be that of her mother as he had first known her. Either way, the sleeping phantasy was a very sweet one, and kept him enthralled in its tender chains of fancy until his valet awoke him the following morning, and he did not bless the man for driving away the pleasant vision; but having awoke to the realities of life, he

arose at once with his mind fixed upon making as early a start as possible.

Having made a hasty breakfast, he took one last look at May's portrait, and having ordered round his private hansom, he was whirled off to the station, taking with him only a small portmanteau in case of emergencies, and was soon on his way to Fernshire.

It was afternoon when he reached St. Ormo Cottages in the hired fly which he took off the station stand; but the driver did not chance to be our talkative little John, or he would probably have heard various little bits of gossip regarding the inmates of the picturesque cottage, even to the news that Sir Roger Dalkeith had gone away somewhere that very morning with his daughter and housekeeper.

As it was, when Lord Ranger drove up to the porch, which was laden with Montana clematis in full bloom, he alighted and rang the hall door bell; but for some time no one replied to his summons. After a while, however, Thomas, who was in charge of the house, came shuffling over the tessellated passage, and did so much unbolting and unobaining that Lord Ranger began to think that Sir Roger kept his daughter under lock and key.

Great was his surprise when old Thomas, having opened the door, informed him that his master and young mistress had gone away from home that very morning, and had left him in charge of the house and premises.

"But I understood that Sir Roger was objected his lordship; and that only yesterday he had a physician down from London. How is it he is fit to travel so soon?"

"Yes, that's all true, sir, about the London doctor," returned Thomas, who felt quite glad to have someone to talk to. "But he ain't ill. Sir Roger's as strong as they're made. It was Miss May; she's ill enough—as white as one of them tall lilies," pointing to some clumps of what is commonly called the annunciation lily, which were not yet in bloom. "When they come out they'll not be whiter than Miss May, poor lamb! It's sad to see her fade. But there," continued the old man, pulling himself up suddenly, "it's not for me to talk, and you're a stranger too. Sir Roger likes silent tongues."

A piece of gold somehow found its way from Lord Ranger's pocket to that of old Thomas'.

"You must not look upon me as a stranger," replied his lordship, with a smile, "considering the fact that I am the lord of the manor, and that the old Manor House and the property for miles round here belongs to me."

"Bless me, sir—my lord, I mean!" cried the gardener, excitedly. "Then you're Lord Ranger? And me to keep you standing here like that! You'll please to walk in, sir?" and Thomas opened the door to its fullest extent.

"Thanks, no; but I will walk with you round the garden. It is very pretty!"

This the Earl did to get out of earshot of the coachman; and he rightly thought that the garden was the old man's element. So he led the way among the shrubs and flowers, Thomas following him.

"I hope Miss Dalkeith is not seriously ill?" he said, anxiously, after a pause.

"I hope not, sir. But there! she frets awful, though she never says a word to anyone that I've heard of."

"Frets?" said the Earl, looking up so sharply as to put Thomas on his guard. "What about?"

"Well, sir, it's not for me to say. It's mortal dull here for a young lady, and although I won't say but what Sir Roger seems terrible put out about her being so poorly, yet it ain't like a mother's care, even though Mrs. Wheeler's been a second mother to her, as one might say, and loves her as if she were her own, as she's often said to me; and she's a kind good creature is Mrs. Wheeler, and it's wonderful how comfortable she makes her little parlour look with a few flowers in

summer, and the tea-kettle a singing on the fire in winter. Ah! there's nothing so home-like as a biling kettle, my lord, as I daresay you've noticed yourself when you've come home tired.

"The rooms over the stable might be worse, but still they might be a deal better; and the chimbley somehow smokes like a tobacco-pipe. But even there the kettle's a comfort, and I often sets it off a singing for company; but company though it is, it ain't much to look at; nothing like Mrs. Wheeler's nice copper one, which I rabs for her every day, summer and winter, that it should never lose its polish."

"And pray who is Mrs. Wheeler?" inquired his lordship.

Thomas rubbed his head furiously.

That anyone should not have heard of Mrs. Wheeler's perfection was almost too much for him; and how to describe her he hardly knew.

He felt it would be treachery to speak of her as a servant, much less as a general servant, so he made a bold dash at it.

"Mrs. Wheeler has been Sir Roger's house-keeper ever since he first came to St. Ormo Cottage, my lord; and I have managed the garden and stable, and helped her indoors, too, with the rough work. Why, I wouldn't let Mrs. Wheeler demean herself by cleaning a knife or pair of boots, nor getting the coal up! no, not to save my place—and I should be old to make a change; people don't care to have men past middle-age now, and it makes it hard for us who is; but I'd chance it, and that I would!"

"You appear to be a great admirer of the housekeeper," laughed the Earl. "And if ever you should lose your situation for any such innocent cause, my good man, why, I have no doubt I could make room for you at one of my estates, so you can let me know. Let me see, I don't know your name, but I shall remember it if you tell me now."

"Thomas Mandrake, my lord; and thank you kindly."

"Oh! there's nothing to thank me for. If you are not young you are a good gardener, or you could not keep this pretty place in the order you evidently do."

Thomas beamed with delight.

"I allus do my best, my lord, I do, indeed; and the little garden is like home to me. But Sir Roger is a gentleman who never forgives; and if ever he found out that I'd kept anything from him as he thought he ought to know, for instance, why he wouldn't keep me a day."

Lord Rangor eyed him attentively.

Somewhat the old gardener's words struck him as not being an imaginary case. But he could not for the life of him think what Thomas could be keeping secret from his master, and he did not feel justified in asking.

"Well, well, you know to whom to apply if you are in need of employment," said his lordship, kindly. "And now I must get back to the station. It is of no use to remain down here now the friends I came to see are gone. Be good enough to give me their address, and I will follow them."

Thomas was most anxious not to offend Lord Rangor, and rubbed his head again in complete perplexity.

"I would in a moment if I know'd it," he replied, "but Sir Roger never said where he was going—not one word. Mrs. Wheeler didn't know, and I very much doubt if Miss May did either. She didn't seem to take much interest in what was going on, but just did as she was told, very meek-like, resting on the pillows as quiet as a mouse."

"But where are you to direct letters?" inquired the Earl, sensibly.

"I ain't to direct them. Sir Roger is coming home for them himself when he wants them!"

"Very well; then I will accept your invitation to go inside, and I will leave a letter for your master, which I shall trust to you to give him the very first time he returns."

"I will, sir, and thank you for your kindness too. I'll not forget, you may be sure."

Lord Rangor went in, and Thomas found for him pens, ink, and paper, belonging to Mrs. Wheeler; and, having written the Baronet a brief note, he left it in Thomas' hands, and took his place once more in the hired fly, en route for the station and London again.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"HUSH!" SAID SIR ROGER. "MY WIFE IS DEAD!"

It was a great disappointment to Lord Rangor to just miss the possibility of seeing Sir Roger Dalkeith and his daughter.

He had really laid no plan of what he was to say, or how he was to act, had they been at home as he anticipated.

It seemed impossible to do so without knowing how he would be received by the Baronet, and whether he found it difficult or even impracticable to see May; but he hoped to manage a quiet interview with her, and to be able to deliver to her her mother's loving message, without asking any permission whatever of her father.

It seemed better to speak without permission than to risk being forbidden to name the subject to Miss Dalkeith, which Lord Rangor thought quite a probable thing to happen if Sir Roger knew that he came as a mediator between his wife, whom he had forsaken, and his daughter, whom he then parted from her for ever. Now, however, he found that the position had changed.

May was ill, and fretting for something; that something might be, as old Thomas had suggested, want of a mother's care—a mother's love. If so, what joy he could bring to her! But how? and when?

He had no idea where to find Sir Roger. He had gone away without leaving a trace of his whereabouts to guide anyone how to find him.

There seemed but one chance now of getting at May, and that was through her father, and the only way of communicating with him was by leaving the letter with Thomas, after which he would be obliged to wait as patiently as he could for Sir Roger to take the next step.

It was necessary, therefore, for him to thoroughly arouse the Baronet, and make him move as quickly as possible, for May's sake.

His lordship sat with Mrs. Wheeler's pen in his hand for some time, before he made any sign of beginning to write, for he was reflecting deeply upon the best means of touching this man of adamant. When at length the letter was written it ran thus,—

"DEAR SIR ROGER.—

"I have only just arrived in England, and being entrusted with a message from Lady Dalkeith to your daughter and hers, I went down without loss of time to deliver it to her at Lake St. Ormo Cottage, where I fully expected to find you both. I need, therefore, scarcely tell you that I am very disappointed to have had a fruitless journey; the more so since I hear that Miss Dalkeith is really ill.

"Under these circumstances may I urge upon you to communicate to me her address without loss of time, for I feel certain that what I have to tell your daughter will greatly cheer her, and, in all probability, materially assist in her restoration to health. Earnestly begging for an immediate answer,—I remain, dear Sir Roger, yours faithfully,

"RANGOR."

This was the letter he left with old Thomas; and, returning to his town-house, he there impatiently waited for a reply.

But days passed into weeks, and not one word did he hear of or from Sir Roger Dalkeith.

More than once he wrote to Thomas Mandrake, and read in his cramped and crabbed handwriting the unwelcome news that his master had not yet returned for his letters.

Lord Rangor fumed inwardly, but the trouble and vexation had no remedy and could be shared by none.

It annoyed him greatly that Mrs. Roslyn should think he would not hurry himself to follow out her wishes, nor could he worry and distress her by writing to tell her the true state of the case.

There was nothing for it but patience, and that Lord Rangor, like many another, found was one of the hardest things of all to practise.

There is always such a satisfaction in doing something to forward one's wishes, or those of one's friends.

Over a month had joined the vast circle of Eternity from the great roll of Time, and the Earl had given himself up to his disappointment, and gone off to amuse himself from Saturday to Monday at the house of an old friend who lived some miles from town; and upon his return he found Sir Roger waiting for him in his study, where the picture of "My Lady of the Lake" took up a very conspicuous position.

No sooner did Lord Rangor open the door than he saw by the Baronet's pale and angry features that something had gone seriously wrong; for instead of meeting him as a friend, with outstretched hand, there was the flash of anger and indignation in his usually cold eyes.

"I request to know the meaning of such a picture as this being in your possession! Are you aware who that lady is?" he inquired, fiercely.

"I bought it at the Academy," returned his lordship, in a conciliating tone. "It was for sale. And, believe me, Sir Roger, it might have fallen into worse hands."

"You do know who it is, then?" gasped the Baronet.

"I believe it to be Miss Dalkeith."

"And what interest can you possibly take in my daughter?" he asked, still in anger. "Up to now I believed you to be unacquainted with her; but—"

"You may retain your belief, Sir Roger, both in her and in me. That picture is the nearest approach to Miss Dalkeith that I have ever seen. But you must not forget that I was a friend of her mother's; and that fact alone would have made me wish to become the owner of such a work of art as that now before us.

"Your daughter is singularly like Lady Dalkeith, Sir Roger; and chiefly for Lady Dalkeith's sake I bought that life-study, which, I fear, it must be. And I am glad to have this opportunity of expressing my regret that I should ever have sent the artist who painted it into your neighbourhood. And I shall be glad if you can assure me that he has caused no annoyance to you or yours in any way, which, from your silence and reticence concerning him, I have dreaded might be the case. If so, I can only ask you to forgive me the careless words which made Mr. Forrester go into Farnshire.

"But for the knowledge that you never leave your little home for more than a few hours I should have been even more uneasy than I was; for no one would doubt but that Sir Roger Dalkeith is thoroughly capable of taking care of his own daughter, even from a picturesque artist like Forrester—"

All at once he left off speaking. There was such a strange, such an awful look upon Sir Roger's face, and his body swayed as that of an intoxicated man might have done.

"I suppose you meant no wrong," he said, slowly, after a pause, and a sharp struggle with himself. "If people were to realize beforehand the consequence of their actions they would be slow indeed in all they do. As it is, all I request is that you never again mention that man's name in my presence. It is an unheard-of piece of audacity in him to paint my daughter's portrait, and place her, without my permission, upon the public walls of the Academy, and one for which I would lay my horsewhip across his back, if I

could but get hold of the impudent scoundrel!" and Sir Roger paced the room with uneven strides, talking to himself in his agitation, apparently forgetful of Lord Rangor's presence.

"Poor thing! Poor little May!" he murmured. "And I had gone to bury her mother, and could not look after her! Foolish, foolish child! Ay, she was but a child, and it was a cruel and unfair advantage!"

The broken words reached Lord Rangor's ears, but he could make nothing of them; they might have been the outpourings of some unknown tongue for all he could understand of their meaning.

He thought that Sir Roger's mind must have failed him; and hoping that the fit of agitation would pass off, he remained quiet and silent, and let him both talk and walk without interfering with him in any way.

Suddenly it seemed to occur to Sir Roger that he was not alone, for he stopped before his lordship.

"What did you pay for that?" he inquired, his glassy eyes fixed upon the picture.

"I gave a thousand for it. It was a high price for a new artist."

"I'll give you two for it. Rangor, if you really know nothing of my daughter, it can hold no interest for you. Sell it to me. You must acknowledge that I have a better right to it than a stranger," said the old man, excitedly. "What must people think to see my daughter hanging on your walls, and you a single man?"

"You forget, Sir Roger, none of my friends know Miss Dalkeith. But perhaps it will not stay very long upon my walls; for the fact is that I think of giving it away to one who it seems to me has a greater claim to it than either of us."

The Baronet's cold grey eyes emitted sparks, as heated steel might do.

He knew of *only one* who could be said to have any such claim or right, and he imagined that Lord Rangor knew it also.

He was too much excited to attempt to govern his judgment, or he would have seen the absurdity of the idea that the Earl would be likely to give the picture back to the man who had painted it, after paying such a sum for its purchase. But when those cold men lose their heads they are even more unreasonable than passionate ones, not indulging to the same extent in the relief of words, while their smothered anger seethes like the boiling lava in a volcano, and you cannot tell the consequences of the pent-up internal disturbance.

"Has that man *dared* to tell you?" he asked, in a terrible voice. "Very well! He shall hear from me what the consequences are of breaking his word to me!"

Lord Rangor looked helplessly at his visitor.

He felt quite certain he was suffering under some painful mental delusion, and he was filled with pity for his too-evident misery.

"Sir Roger," he said, very gently, "you are, I fear, unwell, or over-tired. At any rate, you are labouring under some unaccountable mistake. Let me entreat you to sit down in this easy chair, while I get you some refreshment, and then, perhaps, you will let me explain to you the meaning of the letter which I left for you with your old gardener at Lake St. Orme Cottage, which doubtless you have received from him, and have come to answer in person.

"I regret very much that the sight of the picture of Miss Dalkeith, painted by Mr. Forrester, and exhibited at the Academy, should have annoyed you so much, or rather, I suppose, I ought to say *my possession* of it; for, of course, you must have been aware of the existence of the study, which could only have been taken from life.

"Possibly you may get over your anger when I tell you that I have at last quite made up my mind to present the picture to Lady

Dalkeith, who will value it more than anyone else on earth could do, for her daughter's sake."

Sir Roger regarded the speaker with a glassy stare, fraught with horror.

"Hush!" he said, in an awe-stricken voice. "You cannot. My wife is dead," and he drew white to the lips.

Not much less so became Lord Rangor.

"Great Heaven!" he murmured. "Am I indeed too late? Oh! Sir Roger, when did you hear such terrible news? And I brought your daughter such loving messages from her, which I have been so longing to deliver."

"She died a year ago," returned Sir Roger, sadly. "How often since then I have longed to bring her back, Heaven knows. Surely she would have comforted my little May," and he spoke more as if the words were addressed to himself and his inner conscience rather than to Lord Rangor.

His lordship laid his hand impressively upon the Baronet's arm.

"I pray you to tell me when you heard this," he said, earnestly. "Indeed, I ask from no idle curiosity," and the two men stood looking into one another's faces.

"Yes, I will tell you," returned Sir Roger, somewhat wearily. "There is no reason to hide it. I was sent for to see my wife about a year ago. She was dead when I got there. I never saw her, but I waited till she was laid to rest. She did not die in England, but abroad."

"And this was a year ago!" cried Lord Rangor, struggling with his emotions. "Sir Roger, prepare yourself for a great and joyous surprise. Your daughter is not motherless as you suppose, but has the comfort of a good and noble woman's undying love. Surely such intelligence will go far to cheer, and even cure her."

"I tell you I buried her. I was at her funeral. I stood by her grave as she was lowered into it," answered the old man, in a husky voice. "Lori Rangor, you are dreaming! It is a mercy you did not find poor May at St. Orme Cottage when you sought us there. Such news and the subsequent awakening would about have killed her in her weak state."

"I am not dreaming," returned the Earl. "in truth I am not. You have been deceived, cheated, duped. Heaven grant that it was for no evil purpose. But, believe me, Lady Dalkeith is alive and well, and is leading a useful and a holy life; a blessing to many weary hearts in the town where she resides. She has never forgotten her child, whom she loves dearly; and I hope you will very soon give me the opportunity of delivering the messages entrusted to me. I left her ladyship only a few weeks since, and can speak with certainty of her being alive and well."

Sir Roger was gazing at him with a strained and bewildered look. His face was strangely convulsed.

"Not dead!" he muttered, scarcely above his breath, "Oh! Heaven, can this be true! What does it all mean? Is this, too, his work?"

He raised his hand to his neck as though his collar suffocated him. His body swayed ominously, and before Lord Rangor realised what was going to happen, Sir Roger Dalkeith fell heavily to the ground.

(To be continued.)

PERVERSITY is generally the vice of narrow minds, and, except when it is the effect of anguish and disease, by which the resolution is broken and the mind made too feeble to bear the lightest addition to its miseries, proceeds from an unreasonable regard of the importance of trifles. The proper remedy against it is to consider the dignity of human nature and the folly of suffering perturbation and uneasiness from causes unworthy of our notice.

IN TIME.

Every wrong shall righted be,

In time.

Vice shall surely blighted be,

In time.

Vice is reckless and defiant—

Virtue strong and self-reliant—

Sin will surely wreak her client,

In time.

Every trial must be ended,

In time.

Every ill will be amended,

In time.

Guilt may hide, but not securely—

Her disguise deceives but poorly—

Stern-brow'd justice finds her surely,

In time.

Punishment overtakes transgression,

In time.

Fate compels a full confession,

In time.

None can safely sin for ever—

Conscience leaves the bosom never—

It will crush guilt's best endeavour,

In time.

Sad soul, patience! doubt will vanish,

In time.

Truth's pure light will darkness banish,

In time.

Wait for peace till fate reveals it—

It is near, but Heaven conceals it—

Just the law till Heaven repeals it,

In time.

F. S. S.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

—:—

CHAPTER XIX.

A week passed in a round of continual excitement, and Branda scarcely knew whether she had been happy or not. Certainly, if anything had occurred to vex her, which was pretty frequently in that extraordinary household, she had no time to brood over it.

For the first time in her life dress began to be an object of serious interest, for her guests changed their toilettes so often that she soon came to an end of her moderate supply in trying to hold her own.

She telegraphed to her dressmaker, and to some of the best shops in London, and felt quite proud of herself, as she walked downstairs, one fine morning, in a charming pale pink embroidered cambric, with a broad sash of a darker shade. The colour was especially becoming to her, and she wished in her innocent vanity that Cyril could have seen her for once looking her best.

Instead of her cousin, who would have paid her a laughing compliment, forgotten as soon as spoken, Paul Desborough came across the hall, and stopped abruptly when he caught sight of her. He waited until she was close to him, looking at her fixedly without once moving his eyes.

"When I have a wife," he said, slowly, "she shall have a gown like that!"

"Then I hope she won't be red-haired, because it wouldn't suit her," she said, with a nervous laugh, being flustered by his earnest gaze.

"She won't be red-haired. You might have known that! Shall I tell you what you look like? Too utterly perfect for anything but a dream. Realities are never so delightful!"

"You shall see that I am a reality if you watch me eating my breakfast. The coffee must be waiting, and the Miss McIntoshes as well!"

"Couldn't you say that you had a headache?" looking down at the marble floor, "and break fast with me in that cosy little room upstairs?"

" You might as well ask me to stand on my head ! " and she walked away, with her chin in the air.

He looked after her admiringly, much more captivated by her refusal than he would have been pleased by her consent. Resistance attracted him more than anything else in a woman. It excited his combative qualities, which were unusually strong in his undisciplined nature.

As a boy at Eton he would fight on the smallest provocation, and generally give a good account of his adversary even if he were far bigger than himself.

As he grew older, and found that a straight hit from the shoulder was not "good form" in society, he contented himself with using his tongue rather than his muscles, and often had the satisfaction of flooring his opponent more satisfactorily than ever by the power of his cold, quiet sarcasm.

He could be very biting when his temper was roused, and he had often excited the fiercest hatred by his quiet remarks, which a "black eye" or a heavy blow would never have called into existence.

He had to keep a guard over himself in order not to quarrel with his present host, for his behaviour to his ward—sometimes imperious, at others caressing—galled him inex- pressively.

His desire for an ordinary flirtation with Brenda had developed into an engrossing wish for something infinitely stronger, and he resolved, with set teeth and flashing eyes, that he would never leave The Towers until he had forced her to love him.

He brought his clenched fist down on the carved post at the end of the bannisters, and started when Mrs. Wyndham's maid, Violette, addressed him.

" Pardon, monsieur ! " she said, deprecatingly, as she held out a small note, scented with "exquisite bouquet."

Desborough took the note from her with a sullen frown, and read it through without a word.

" The answer for Madame ? " she asked after a pause, during which she had been smoothing her curls by the help of a looking-glass let into the panelled wall.

" There is no answer ! " he said sternly, as he crushed the note in his hand, and turned away without another glance in her direction.

" But Madame expects one. I cannot face her with an empty hand ! " raising her eyebrows and looking disconcerted.

" It will not be the first time that she has been disappointed," he said, coolly, and, opening the door of the breakfast-room, disappeared.

" Ah ! the fool of a man ! " exclaimed Violette, " as if a pretty woman could not always get as much or even more than she desired. Only wait one little moment and see ! " and shaking her finger, though he was no longer there to see, she tripped back again up the broad staircase.

Mrs. Wyndham was lying on a sofa in the dressing-room attached to the very best bedroom at The Towers. She was attired in a tea-gown of softest pale blue silk, beautifully smocked, with frills of finest lace down the front, and round the neck and sleeves. Her fluffy yellow hair was fastened on the top of her small head with a bow of rich blue ribbon, but a few soft curls hung about her white forehead.

She was as fair as it was possible to be, with the tint of a blush-rose on her cheeks, of a jacquemino on her lips. Her nose was rather inclined to turn up, which lent a piquancy to her expression, contradicted by the utter innocence of her large blue eyes—an innocence which had not proved harmless to the world.

Her figure was full, yet perfect in its round lines; her hands, with their pretty pink palms and taper fingers, were soft and white as any baby's; the tiny feet peeping out from beneath her skirts in quilted slippers of pale blue were almost faultless.

She was a woman for some men to rave about—a woman with no more beauty perhaps than Flossie Whitehead, the doctor's daughter—and yet she was likely to break twenty hearts where the other would probably only break one—and that her own.

Her eyes sought the door as soon as her maid's hand was on the handle.

" Well, the answer—quick ! "

" There is no answer, Madame," said Violette, uplifting her hands in foreign fashion.

" No answer ! —impossible ! " raising herself on her elbow. " He must have sent one. You've dropped it on the stairs—or he told it you—and you've forgotten it. Don't be a fool, but tell me at once, or it will be the worse for you ! "

" I asked the Monsieur for an answer and he said, ' There is no answer,' and then I ventured to remark that Madame would be disappointed, and he said, quite roughly, ' That it would not be the first time,' " watching her mistress with a pair of mischievous eyes which tried to look demure.

Mrs. Wyndham sprang to her feet, her face flushed with rage and mortification.

" Oh, the brute ! —the brute ! " she cried, with more strength than elegance of language. " The barbarous fiend ! —he insults me ! —he treats me with scorn ! —he thinks to tread me under his feet ! I'm only a woman, he thinks, but a woman can do ten times more harm than a man, and he shall find it out. Violette, where was he—do you hear ? "

" In the hall. I saw him talking with the young lady and I would not interrupt, but I saw the soft eyes that he made at her. Ah ! Madame, it is the truth I tell; but he looked as if he could eat her."

" Looks don't do much harm," with a frown, as she put her small white teeth to the corner of her pretty handkerchief and viciously bit it to shreds. " But you surely heard something ? Don't pretend that you didn't listen, for I know you did."

" Ah, Madame, Heaven knows I never listen but on your account alone; but it is the perfect truth that he asked her shamelessly to have breakfast alone with him upstairs—and she looked as if she would have liked it—only something stood in the way."

" Disgraceful ! Ah ! with all her pride, her shocked looks, her disdainful tosses of her head, she is no better than the rest. Let them be tempted by a man with a soft voice or a smoother tongue than most, and they give way like a glacier in a thaw. But it must be stopped," stamping her foot with a French oath, which came all too glibly from her pretty lips. " Find Sir Eric, and tell him I want to speak to him."

" But, Madame, suppose that he is with the other messieurs in the stables, or on the lawn ? " in a tone of expostulation.

" If he is on the house-top he shall come ! " with a flash of her blue eyes. " You forget yourself, Violette. You've got to obey, and not to argue."

The maid went to the door, shrugging her shoulders expressively, and grumbling to herself, whilst her mistress leant her white forehead against the turquoise velvet of the mantel-shelf and gave vent to an angry sigh.

Quick as lightning her thoughts went back to the long ago when life seemed like an old-fashioned summer's day, full of the scent of roses and the golden glory of the sun. There were no clouds then, no broken vows, no ruined hopes, no wild regrets.

How joyously they had cast the seed right and left, and never thought of the harvest ! And yet the time of harvest came round—and the crop was different to what they expected.

How well she remembered one day, which seemed to stand out from all the rest. Only seventeen, with a face like the spring in its beauty and freshness, and hair like the golden corn, she stepped out of the country rectory, where her father, with his kindly, benevolent face, and his air of ecclesiastical dignity, was writing his sermon; and her mother, with

sleeves tucked up over her elbows, was teaching to a rosy-cheeked cook the mysteries of a pudding which found favour at the Hall. She turned her back on the simple safety of the house, and went joyously down to the river.

He came to her, and sat close by her side, his dark eyes looking into hers, her small hands clasped in his, and the hours passed on like the rippling waters, and the beams of the sun came slanting through the tall heads of the rushes; and still they sat, as if the whole day were before them, till the clang of a dinner-bell startled them, like the last tramp of judgment.

One long, lingering kiss, a promise of meeting on the morrow, and they parted; she going with fleet steps across the meadow to a side-gate in the garden-fence, he striding recklessly through the long grass towards the Hall.

Long before night the girl's face was wet with bitter tears; and when he came to the river the next day, the little nest amongst the grasses at the foot of the old den was empty !

But this was long ago, and Sir Eric Farquhar, Bart., of The Towers, Blankshire, was knocking at the door.

Mrs. Wyndham raised her head, composed her face, smoothed her ruffled hair, and said,—

" Come in ! "

He came in, took her hand, and kissed it.

" It was very good of you to send for me ! "

She smiled, and pointed to a chair, whilst she sat down on the sofa.

" Not so very good, perhaps, for I want to talk to you. Tell me what are your plans ? "

" My plans are yours," he said, with a smile. " I place my house, my servants, my carriages and horses, and, last of all, myself," with a low bow, " at your disposal ! Do with us what you will ! "

" You are most kind ! Supposing I say that it is my whole ambition to astonish the natives of this place ? " watching him with mischievous eyes. " Shall I make your hair stand on end ? "

" Not at all. I always thought you would," looking perfectly satisfied. " Do you think I care one brass farthing if everyone in Blankshire thinks we have gone mad, so long as you are content ? "

" Is a woman ever content ? Find me a contented woman, and I'll fall down and worship her ! " looking at her pocket-handkerchief, which she had so ruthlessly destroyed only a few minutes before.

" What have you done to it ? " his attention caught by the ragged corner. " It's the prettiest little thing of the kind I ever saw; but it looks as if it had been bitten by a rat ! "

" Or caught in the lock of a drawer ? Don't you think that's more likely ? "

" At any rate, as it has happened in my house you must let me give you another ? " earnestly.

" Nonsense ! I've so many handkerchiefs I don't know what to do with them. But tell me about this ward of yours. What do you intend to become of her ? " watching his face with suppressed eagerness.

But it did not change in the least. Sir Eric was at present so entirely under the spell of Lillian Wyndham's fascinations, that everybody else retired into the shade.

At the moment, he could have seen Brenda at the steps of the altar with any man on earth by her side without a single pang of regret, so he was able to answer with the utmost coolness,—

" I mean to marry her, of course, to the best man that turns up. I really think Desborough might do. He's terribly smit, and that's one step gained. Good Heavens ! Lillian, what's the matter ? "

" It's only the pain in my side," she said, tremulously, as she turned away her face, which was white to the very lips. " Did I ever give you leave to call me anything but Mrs. Wyndham ? "

"You must forgive me. It slipped out because I was frightened. I thought you were going to die!" gazing at her still with startled eyes.

"How ridiculous!" she exclaimed, pettishly. "English air never agrees with me. I was a fool to come to Blankshire!"

Sir Eric looked as deeply grieved as if he had just heard that his dearest friend was dying.

"Don't say that! I can't bear it!" he said, hoarsely.

"My dear friend, you'll have to bear much more than that!" she laughed, carelessly. "Now go, or I shall never get downstairs."

CHAPTER XX.

It was a very oppressive evening, when not a breath of air came in at the wide-open windows, and the wax candles looked inclined to make low obeisance to each other.

There was no energy left in any of the party. The Miss McIntoshes' volatile tongues were quiet for a wonder, and the fire of chaff, which they liked to carry on from morning till night, went off in little pistol-shots when an opportunity came that was too good to be lost.

Lord Pinkerton and Captain Porter answered them feebly every now and then, but nobody was up to giving anything more than a smile, even when a joke was really beyond the average.

Lady Manville kept applying a salts-bottle to her nose, and leaning back with half-closed eyes, as if to show to the company in general that only a stern sense of duty prevented her from retiring to her room.

Lady Pinkerton was talking in a low voice of her little child's severe illness when cutting its two first teeth, and Brenda was dividing her attention between the baby's ailments and Major Winter's attempts at conversation.

There were several other people in the drawing-room, who have nothing to do with our story, but three were absent, who are destined to play an important part in it.

At ten o'clock Mrs. Wyndham put her hand to her head with a gesture of pain, and, saying that she really was incapable of sitting up any longer, retired gracefully from the room.

Sir Eric had been called out of the room on some business connected with a future fete, and was detained far longer than he intended.

He was shut up in the library, where only the soft echo of the dance music could reach his ears, and he was kept on thorns, imagining all the while he was discussing most uninteresting details that "his Lillian" was smiling on someone else.

Desborough was the object of his special jealousy, for several times during the long summer day he had caught her attention wandering from himself in a vain attempt to overhear the conversation he was carrying on with anybody else.

This was what made him suddenly forget all his scruples about his ward's marriage with an utterly unprincipled man. He was ready absolutely to throw her at his head, and Paul often wondered, as he pulled his dark moustaches, with something like a shiver, why so many facilities were thrown in his way.

The girl herself kept him off with cold reserve, never having forgiven him for that impudent suggestion that she should breakfast alone with him upstairs, in her private sitting-room; but he had striven hard to regain his ground by an irreproachable demeanour ever since.

There had been some dancing that evening, till the heat became overpowering, and though he grudged every waltz she gave to any other man he did not plague her to dance with him more than once or twice.

He was reserving himself for Lady Thornton's ball the following evening, when he meant, as it were, to take possession of her, and make their flirtation so patent to the

world that she would have difficulty in drawing back.

He was rewarded for his caution during the last dance by the fact that she relaxed the severity of her manner, and smiled on him as brightly as on any other man.

He could not flatter himself that she showed him the smallest sign of preference; but the withered rose, which he still kept inside his coat, prevented his hopes from fading, and her graciousness sent his spirits up to "set fair."

It was with a slow, reluctant step that he made his way to the nearest window, as the hand of the Louis Quinze clock was on the stroke of eleven.

One glance back at the small proud head with its crown of curls, and then, with a sigh, he stepped out into the still fragrance of the night.

It seemed to his excited fancy as if his wretched past were beckoning him from the brightness of the present, and his face was stern and set, as if he were about to meet his bitterest enemy, as he crossed the dewy lawn.

Sir Eric's keen glances went round the room as soon as he had shaken himself free of his tormentors, and he at once noticed that Mrs. Wyndham had vanished from the chair where she had been lounging, and that Paul Desborough was no longer hovering about Miss Farquhar.

Brenda watched the angry cloud gathering on his face with a sense of amusement, because she knew exactly as if he had told her what was passing through his mind; and she could not help feeling a sort of contemptuous compassion for his utter devotion to such a thoroughly unworthy object.

"I don't see Mrs. Wyndham. I hope she's not in the garden, for we are going to have a storm!"

"Oh, dear, no! Don't be alarmed!" she said, with a saucy smile. "I suppose we bored her, for she retired upstairs with a headache!"

"She's not unwell?" anxiously, but feeling as if he should like to shake his ward for that impertinent smile.

"Not at all! Only, unfortunately, we didn't interest her, and she went."

"And Desborough, what has become of him?" the frown going away from his forehead, because it was so pleasant to hear that the poor little thing was dull in his absence.

"Do you know, Lord Pinkerton?" looking over her shoulder, as if she had not taken the trouble to notice the missing man's movements.

His lordship laughed.

"Fact is, I believe Miss Farquhar snubbed him, so he went off into the garden, to sulk over a cigar."

"Nothing of the kind," said Brenda, indignantly. "I've been talking to your wife and the Major."

"Exactly!" with twinkling eyes, "if you had been talking to him he wouldn't have been driven to the slugs and snails!"

"You horrid creature!" exclaimed Lady Pinkerton. "Who but you would talk of slugs and snails, instead of stars and roses?"

"Fancy me, a married man, with a small responsibility in petticoats, mauldering about the stars! Why, any fellow can do that, and I'm a fellow above it!"

There was a general laugh, but it soon died away for want of energy to keep it up. Sir Eric fidgeted about as if he did not know what to do with himself, but when the musicians struck up an old favourite, called "Golden Love," he strode across the room and asked Lady Pinkerton to be his partner. More out of politeness than inclination she consented, whilst Brenda took a few turns with the Viscount, and several other couples thought they would like to begin again. Brenda found her partner danced so badly that she stopped as soon as she could by the large window at the end of the room.

"How dark and still it looks!" she said, looking out into the darkness, but as she

spoke the excessive stillness was broken by the sound of three screams following each other in rapid succession—screams which sounded like a woman's voice raised in helpless agony.

"Somebody has fallen into the river!" she exclaimed, turning a white face on the Viscount, who stood like a block, with eyes and mouth wide open. The next moment she was running at full speed across the lawn towards the darkness of the shrubbery, which at that end of the grounds separated the gardens from the river.

"For Heaven's sake, stop!" he shouted, as his mind reverted to poachers, and he hurried after her as fast as his legs could carry him, but he caught his foot in some tangled shrub, and fell head foremost into a bed of roses, whilst she flew on ahead of him.

Just as she was entering the shrubbery, she saw a figure dressed all in white come out of it, and make a dart for the house by the door into the conservatory. Determined to get at the truth, and with no fear for her own safety, she pushed on till she reached the river bank, and stood panting and breathless, looking with bewildered eyes at the rushing waters. Did they carry any dark secret of suicide or murder beneath their hurrying waves? An icy chill crept over her when she found herself face to face with Paul Desborough!

"What are you doing here?" he asked, with a strange hoarseness in his voice.

Before she could answer him, Sir Eric dashed through the trees, calling out to some one behind him.—

"This way, bring a light! Good Heavens, Desborough, is it you? What has happened? You heard that unearthly scream?"

"I heard an owl screech!" he said slowly, as he stepped under the shadow of a branch. "Is that what you are making such a fuss about?"

"It can't have been an owl! We thought somebody was being murdered!"

By this time a group of eager men were standing round, and Markham had a lantern in his hand.

Its fitful light fell on Brenda's slight figure, and on something white which had fallen amongst the rushes on the very edge of the bank.

"Hullo! what's this?" and Sir Eric stooped to pick it up. Markham came forward with his lantern, and the others crowded round.

Brenda recognised it at a glance. Though soiled and crumpled it was certainly the dainty little handkerchief, with the pointed scallops and frills of lace, which Mrs. Wyndham had held in her hand that night.

The "Exquisite bouquet" with which it was scented told its own tale as well, and Sir Eric's face grew suddenly white and stern as his fingers closed on it convulsively.

"It is Miss Farquhar's handkerchief!" said Paul Desborough, quietly. "It must have dropped from her just now."

Brenda knew it was a falsehood, but something kept her from denying it, as Sir Eric put it into her hand.

He drew her aside, and she could see how terribly agitated he was as he stooped very low to whisper,—

"Take it to her at once, and ask if she's there, and come back quickly, for Heaven's sake! I shall be in the hall."

She hurried away, the gravest anxiety giving speed to her footsteps.

It was a mystery she could not understand, the most horrible thoughts flashed through her brain.

Why was the handkerchief lying on the very verge of the water? And why did Paul Desborough tell a lie about it? What made his voice so hoarse? And why did he stand so persistently in the shadow, so that no one could study his face?

Nothing could really have happened to Mrs. Wyndham, for it must have been she who went in by the conservatory-door. Still it

would be a great satisfaction to know that she was safe and well; and Brenda never stopped till she reached the door of her bedroom.

She knocked, but there was no answer. Her heart beat so loudly that she could not hear a single sound within.

She knocked again impatiently, bruising her knuckles with the force she used, yet unconscious of the pain because of the terror that was growing upon her.

Her hand was already on the handle, for she was resolved to know the truth, when it was turned by somebody inside, and as the door was partially opened Violette stood in the aperture.

"Eh, mademoiselle, what is it? Is the house on fire?" she asked, in an aggrieved tone of voice.

"Give this handkerchief to your mistress," Brenda said, panting. "And tell her that Sir Eric found it by the river."

"Dear Miss Farquhar, is that you?" cried a voice from further in the room, which was unmistakably Mrs. Wyndham's, though Brenda, from her knowledge of the arrangement of the furniture, knew that it did not come from the direction of the bed. "Excuse my not asking you in, but my poor head is maddening. Is that my lost handkerchief you've brought me? How very good of you to trouble yourself about it! I dropped it this afternoon! Good-night. May you sleep better than I shall, though I've been in bed for hours."

Brenda turned away relieved, but indignant.

She felt perfectly certain that Mrs. Wyndham was down by the river with Mr. Desborough, in spite of her assertions to the contrary, and she knew that if she had been able to force an entrance she would have seen her lying on the sofa in the same dress she had worn the whole evening. But she meant to keep her doubts to herself, lest Sir Eric should fly into a fearful rage, and do something desperate.

And yet her heart ached for him in a sudden pang of pity as she looked over the bannisters and saw him standing at the foot of the stairs—a perfect specimen of manhood, with his tall, straight figure, his magnificent breadth of shoulder, and the handsome face—so worn and haggard in the flower of his age!

Directly he saw her he sprang up the stairs, taking two or three at a stride.

"Well?" with eager eyes fixed on her face.

"Mrs. Wyndham was much obliged for the handkerchief, which she dropped this afternoon. Her head aches maddeningly, and she says she has been in bed for hours."

"Why do you say, 'she says'?" "Don't you believe it?"

"Why shouldn't she be in bed? She left the drawing-room hours ago!"

"Brenda, tell me honestly, what do you think of this?" laying his hand on her shoulder.

"Supposing she wanted frantically to talk to Mr. Desborough, why should she trouble herself to go out into the garden at midnight, when she can see him any hour of the day?" she answered diplomatically, almost convincing herself by the soundness of the argument. "And why should she scream when she saw him?"

"You are right," with a sigh of relief, as he passed his hand over his forehead, "only I am such a confounded fool about her. I feel," clutching his fingers nervously, "if any fellow came between us I should murder him!"

"Is she so much better than other people?" raising her eyebrows with an infinite sense of her own superiority.

"No, not that," with a slight smile, "only I love her!" and he turned away with a nod that meant "good-night."

CHAPTER XXI.

The next morning everybody was late except Miss Farquhar and Mr. Desborough. Generally, she would have been much annoyed at finding herself alone with him, but to-day she had a question to ask him, so she was thankful for the laziness of other people. She began at once, whilst he was setting light to the spirit-lamp.

"Fray may I ask, Mr. Desborough, why you pretended that that handkerchief was mine last night?"

He stooped over the lamp, but his voice betrayed nothing except some slight offence.

"I don't know why you should say 'pretended,' Miss Farquhar. It was lying close to where you had been standing, and as you were the only lady there, I supposed it had dropped from you—that is all."

"Couldn't you see that it was Mrs. Wyndham's?" looking at him hard.

He returned her glance so boldly that she had to drop her eyes.

"When Farquhar held it up I saw that it was like the ridiculous things she uses, but as she had gone to bed long ago I did not see how it could get by the river."

"People can pretend to go to bed, and go out in the garden instead," in a tone of much significance.

"They can if the object is worth it. There is no depth of dissimulation through which a woman will not pass under some circumstances."

"Or men either!" with a swift glance from under her lashes at his imperturbable face.

"Men are not such good hands at it."

There was a pause, during which he was cramming up a piece of bread in nervous agitation. He looked up, and saw her eyes fixed on him with an evident expression of distrust. He broke out passionately,

"Good heavens! You don't think that woman is anything to me! I tell you if she comes between you and me I should like to see her floating in that river, and I would be the last man to stretch out a hand to save her!"

Such an intensity of hatred flashed from his eyes that she recoiled involuntarily, though she drew herself up proudly.

"If you mean what you say, you are no better than a coward and murderer!" she said very quietly. "As for the rest I can't conceive what you are thinking of! She stands between me and my guardian, and does me a service by engrossing his attention; but in no other way has she anything to do with me."

Mr. Desborough was just going to speak when he looked over his shoulder, and saw the Miss McIntoshes and the other guests coming into the room.

For once he was thankful for the interruption. During the rest of the time that he sat at the table he said little, but thought the more.

His conscience was not quite deadened, and it seemed to be unusually alive that morning. It told him as plainly as possible that he ought to go away from The Towers, and leave an innocent girl to go on her way without him.

Knowing the past that lay behind him—fearing the possible future that stood in front of him—he was bound in honour to give her up, and yet day after day he lingered.

He had resolved so confidently to conquer this country-girl, who knew so little of the ways of the world, and, consequently, could so easily be taken in—who had met so few men with more than two ideas in their heads—that a man like himself would have her at a disadvantage.

He had never doubted of his success; and now, if his fears did not deceive him, it was she who had conquered, and completely turned the tables on him.

He was, in fact, growing more helplessly in love every day. He liked to sit by her at breakfast, and watch her every movement. The turn of her wrist as she helped the sugar,

the droop of her lashes as she filled the different cups, the bright flash from her wonderful eyes as she made a brilliant repartee—all were a delight to him.

Though a notoriously lazy man, he was always down in time to instal himself in the chair by her side before anyone else could get it, till at last it became a recognised right, and no one cared to interfere with it because they supposed the arrangement was made with Miss Farquhar's consent.

"Well, Mrs. Seddon, how are you?" he said, pleasantly, when he met the portly house-keeper passing through the hall on her way to the kitchen department. "You look like a walking sunbeam!"

"Very good of you, sir, to say so, but it's no wonder if I do," smiling all over her plump face, "considering the news I've just been told by the groom from the Hall. I know one young lady who will jump for joy, bless her heart, when she hears that Mr. Cyril will be at the ball to-night!"

"You don't say so?" the colour rising in his usually pale face. "Does Miss Farquhar know?"

"Not yet, sir, I've been waiting my opportunity to come across her."

"Do me a favour, Mrs. Seddon. Let me tell her instead of you. It is always so delightful to spread good news!"

"Well, I'm sure, if it's to oblige you, sir!" not liking to say "no!" but feeling disappointed nevertheless. "But you won't keep it from her much longer, and you won't tell it her before Sir Eric," lowering her voice, and giving a hasty look over her shoulder. "You know there's a sort of a kind of a feeling like jealousy in most families."

"There shan't be a soul to hear it but Miss Farquhar herself, and I won't lose a minute in telling her."

With a good-natured nod he went off towards the drawing room, remembering that Brenda had said she was going to put some fresh flowers in one of the vases, but his heart was heavy as lead.

It was so pleasant to be told that she would jump for joy because that other man was coming! "Jump for joy!" His lip curled in contempt of the homely expression.

Fancy Miss Farquhar jumping like a school-girl over a skipping-rope, just because a cousin had come into the neighbourhood!

What was the fellow to her? He pushed open the door, and shut it behind him, as soon as he perceived her standing in her blue cambric by the tall vase at the other end of the long room.

She looked up at the sound of his footsteps, though they did not make much noise on the thick pile carpet, which covered the centre of the polished boards.

"I've come to make a bargain," he began, as he took up a crimson rose, and smelt it. "What will you give me for a piece of good news?"

"Of real good news? I don't believe there is such a thing in the world!" disdainfully, as she arranged some dark leaves amongst delicate fronds of fern.

"It will be thundering good news for you!" his face growing sullen. "And I'm going to sell it to you as dearly as I can!"

That look on his face gave her a hope, as the vivid colour rushed into her own.

"Does Eric know? Won't anybody else tell me?"

"I gather that Farquhar does not know, and no one else will tell you. Give me the first dance and the last, and two or three others to-night at the Hall?"

"Cyril's coming, I do believe!" clasping her hands. "Oh! is it true? Tell me at once!"

"I will tell you nothing unless you agree to my conditions," studying each varying expression of her face, and half driven wild by the joy in her eyes.

"I agree to anything! anything!" absolutely quivering with impatience.

"Your cousin Cyril Farquhar will be at the Thorntons to-night!" he said, slowly, obliged



[MRS. WYNDHAM SPRANG TO HER FEET, HER FACE FLUSHED WITH RAGE AND MORTIFICATION.]

to look, yet knowing that the delight in her face would be like a stab to his heart.

She did not say much, only her face became like the rose she held in her hands, and crushed in a convulsive clasp.

A little, half-suppressed cry of joy broke from her, that was all; but Paul flung away from her, and out of the window, as if she had struck him.

Brenda was so engrossed with the intelligence that she never noticed his abrupt departure.

After awhile she went on with her occupation, lingering over it affectionately, because it afforded her such a pleasant time for thinking.

Cyril liked simplicity in dress, so she must tell Mary, her maid, that she will wear the white tulle, spangled with pearls, which had just come down from London, with the wreaths of white orchids, intermixed with dark leaves.

It was more girlish than the sumptuous one of white satin and lace which Sir Eric had ordered for her in a fit of generosity; and, though, of course, she only loved him for the sake of "Auld Lang Syne," it was natural that she should try to please his eye whenever they chanced to meet.

All the day long she was so happy that Paul Desborough watched her with growing anger, and Sir Eric's attention was roused.

He had heard that his brother had come down with the Allinghams to Thornton Hall, and he had tried to invent an excuse for keeping everyone at home at The Towers; but an unexpected obstacle stood in his way, for Mrs. Wyndham announced her fixed intention of going, as the whole party were invited.

Sir Eric was surprised, and he suggested that they could dance very well at home, in a much less crowded room.

Mrs. Wyndham stuck to her point, and nothing would make her budge from it.

She wanted to see the Hall, the celebrated exotic, the world-renowned picture gallery,

the crowds of country people; and, above all, she wished to display an exquisite toilette which she had brought with her from Paris.

"By-the-bye, I have to thank you for returning me my pocket-handkerchief," she said, with a slightly sarcastic smile. "I should have been still more grateful if you had kept it to yourself till the next morning. Miss Farquhar, with her vigorous thumps at the door, startled me out of the sweetest sleep I had ever had!"

"I'm awfully sorry!" looking quite guilty. "I—I thought you might be anxious about it!"

"Thanks. It isn't the only one I've got," very dryly.

Sir Eric felt smaller still; and, being eager to drop the subject, and vent his annoyance on someone else, he went off to find his ward.

"It would be absurd to take the whole party to the Hall!" he began, as he took the scissors from her hand as they stood under an arch of roses, and picked a bunch from far above her head.

"I don't imagine the McIntoshes would like to be left behind," quietly, adding a few leaves to her basket, inwardly preparing for what was coming.

"They would not object if you stayed with them!"

"Possibly not; but I shan't propose it to them."

"Supposing I insist?" looking down his nose.

"It wouldn't make any difference," meeting his eyes bravely, though her heart was beating fast.

"I could prevent you if I chose."

"Only at the risk of a public scandal! For if you refused me any of the carriages I should be capable of driving there in a butcher's cart!"

"I could lock you in your room," looking as if he should like to thrash her.

"Yes, if you had the key," mentally re-

solving to keep it for the future in her pocket. "And let me tell you what people would say if they missed me."

"That you were staying behind to flirt at your ease whilst the cat was away," with a sneer.

"Not at all. They would say I had refused to go out with you and Mrs. Wyndham!"

With this parting thrust she turned away, and left him flushed in the face and silenced.

He was very cross for the rest of the day, but she avoided him as much as she could, and allowed nothing to damp her cheerfulness.

She felt that she could bear any amount of rough speeches, frowns, and sneers, so long as she was quite sure to meet Cyril that night.

Mary, the maid, fully entered into her mistress's anxiety to look her very best, for she had a sweetheart herself, who was formerly groom at The Towers, and she knew that she always liked to put on her most becoming bonnet when he was likely to be in church.

Brenda looked the personification of all that was best in English girlhood as she stood at the door of Sir Eric's study shortly before ten o'clock.

He called out "Come in!" and she entered in what Cyril used to call "her war-paint and feathers."

She stood still with surprise on the threshold, whilst he looked up at her from the glittering diamonds which he held in his hand, his breath almost taken away by her beauty.

(To be continued.)

The delights of thought, of truth, of work, and of well-doing will not descend upon us like the dew upon the flower without effort of our own. Labour, perseverance, self-denial, fortitude, watchfulness, are the elements out of which this kind of joy is formed.



[TWO TROUBLED HEARTS]

NOVELLETTE.]

FROM DARK TO DAWN.

—:o:—

CHAPTER I.

"By night and day, in joy and grief,
Do thou love me!"

—*Whyte Melville.*

"You will write often, Nellie?"

The young girl turned almost impatiently from her pale, insignificant-looking lover, and a shade of vexation deepened her dark eyes; but she said quietly,—

"I will write, but as I am going away for a fortnight *only*, David, I shall have very little to say that will not wait the telling until my return."

"It seems horribly selfish, I know, but I wish with all my heart you were not going. I never had so great a prejudice to any trip as this."

"I can't understand that. I suppose I shall be perfectly safe with uncle and aunt, and I shall see no one else!"

"You can't be sure of that, Nellie," with a wistful glance at her, "and—and well I am so afraid you may meet some other fellow, and prefer him to me. You don't think, dear, I am blind to my homely appearance and *gauche* manner? And if I lose you I don't much care what else happens to me."

"You would soon forget me!" lightly. Now, David, say good-bye, and please try to look less wretched. People well know we are engaged!"

"And what if they do?"

"Oh! I hate any vulgar display of feeling," petulantly. "There! I did not mean to hurt you, David," and the smile she gave him amply atoned for the pain she had inflicted. "This hot weather always spoils my temper; then I hate travelling alone, and I don't know

Uncle Fred. I wish mother had been persuaded to go with me."

"You will be happy enough when you are safely in St. Ethelreda; and you *will* return by the given date?"

"Yes; I daresay I shall be quite tired of the place in fourteen days, and I should not like to outstay my welcome. Here is my train. Is the luggage safe?"

"Quite; and you will have a comfortable journey down, as there is no changing. Good-bye, Nellie, dear; be true to me!"

"Good-bye!"

Just a hand-clasp, one swift passionate lock into the girlish face, and then the train steamed out of the station, David Knight watching it until he could see it no more. Then slowly and heavily he went back to his office, trying by hard work to conquer the fear that Nellie Paget would not return to him as she went.

He had never flattered himself that the girl loved him with half the passion he lavished upon her; but then she was so young—only seventeen—and thought and feeling alike were immatured. He was twenty-four, and oh! so hopelessly homely.

But he had loved her from the first hour he saw her, and Mrs. Paget had favoured his suit most unmistakably.

It seemed a good thing to her to remove this darling daughter from the fear of poverty, to know she was safe in David's love and home; so she had praised him just a little too highly to Nellie, had extolled his worth very freely, decrying mere personal beauty, and exalting moral goodness until the poor child realised, all too keenly, her lover was a very ordinary creature externally. Still she had a genuine affection for him, not yet to be dignified by the name of love, and was naturally elated by her possession of a *bond fide* suitor so early in life.

But there were times when she grew utterly weary of her thralldom, utterly impatient of poor, honest, faithful David.

Now that she was leaving home for awhile she determinately put aside all thought of him, all pity for his unrequited passion. She would enjoy herself to the utmost, because the time of her freedom was now so short.

All in the glow of a July afternoon she reached St. Ethelreda, and experienced a chill of disappointment as her eyes rested on the dingy little city, the flat low-lying country, the sluggish river, with its fringe of rushes.

But she had small time to indulge her discontent, because as she stepped from the carriage a tall man of somewhat peculiar appearance came forward with outstretched hand.

"You are Nellie," he said, cordially, "I knew you at once from your great likeness to poor Tom. Your aunt could not meet you, my dear, because baby has a slight attack of measles. You need not be scared; the nursery is so far removed from the other rooms that there is no danger of infection. Now I'll see after your luggage!"

He had spoken so rapidly that Nellie found no chance to reply; but now she said,—

"I am afraid, Uncle Fred, I have timed my visit very badly. Aunt will be too worried with baby to wish for visitors."

"Not at all!" cheerfully; "one or the other is always on the sick list; we're proverbial for it. Bless my soul, Nellie, Doctor Greer would soon be insolvent if we removed. A month ago Jessie was down with pleurisy, the next week your aunt had a pretty sharp attack of bronchitis, last week Cyril sprained his ankle, and now the baby is a victim to measles."

He laughed as though he considered the catalogue of woes amusing.

"I suppose you can walk to Tenby House, Nellie; it isn't a stone's throw from here? When I've realised those railway shares you know of I'll set up a carriage and play the grandee. This way, my dear. The luggage will follow soon."

Out on the dusty road he turned once more to his niece.

"There's the house, just beyond that large elm. It's a queer, old-fashioned place, but I fancy we can give you a pleasant time, and Ann has asked a young cousin down, so that you should not feel dull. He is a nice fellow, and I haven't the least doubt you'll be good friends."

"I don't think I'm very quarrelsome," laughing, and wondering a little why Uncle Fred allowed his curly hair to grow in such a tremendous stock.

"How old is my new friend?"

"Twenty. I think Nellie we must label you 'engaged' to prevent mischief."

"That would be too bad. I want to forget all about my engagement while I am here."

He glanced keenly at her.

"That doesn't sound as though you are still amoured with Mr. Knight. I hope, Nellie, you do not intend marrying merely for a home!"

"Oh, no!" blushing painfully. "Of course I am—very—very fond of David, and he is so good to us all. Then you see, uncle, when I am married I shall be able to help mother and the children. It is hard work sometimes to make both ends meet."

"I am afraid it is, but you had better suffer a little privation than marry a man you do not really love," Mrs. Paget said, as he led the way into a large old-fashioned garden.

Mrs. Paget met them in the porch, and having welcomed Nellie warmly, said,—

"Come into this room and have some tea before removing your hat and jacket; there is nothing so refreshing as tea after a journey. Oh, Swinton you are here! Let me introduce you to my niece. Mr. Swinton Cross, Miss Paget."

A dark-faced youth came forward, and, having been presented duly, wheeled a chair to the window and sat down beside Nellie.

"How do you think you will like St. Ethelreda?" he said, looking frankly into the young, fresh face suffused with a crimson blush.

"Isn't it rather flat?" ventured Nellie, diplomatically.

"Yes, and it must be awfully dreary in the winter, but it is very jolly just now, and there are some pretty places round. You would be surprised too, to see the countless wild flowers growing in the fens. The river, of course, is slow, but you get very good boating, and that is a great thing."

"You must take Nellie as far as Ploverton when she is rested. Fred is too busy to-day, and so I rely upon you to amuse and protect my niece."

"I'm very trustworthy," gaily. "Do you like the water, Miss Paget? Some ladies are so nervous."

"I am not; and shall be very glad to go, unless, aunt, you would rather I stayed in."

"Go, by all means. You must live out of doors nearly, for I intend sending you home as brown as a berry. Now come upstairs, you will like to wash, and, perhaps, unpack. I saw your box carried in about three minutes ago."

The room consecrated to the girl was long and lofty, furnished daintily in pink and white, with tiny tables here and there, each boasting a bouquet of sweet-smelling, old-fashioned flowers.

Nellie looked round with appreciative eyes, and sighed to think of the small overcrowded rooms at home—the weary life of labour which the dear mother endured so bravely and patiently. But she had no time for thought; Mrs. Paget was talking cheerfully, and she roused herself to listen and answer.

They had tea in the garden under the shadow of a huge apple tree, and within sight of trailing clematis and jasmine. Then Mrs. Paget returned to the nursery, and Nellie walked slowly towards the river with Swinton Cross, listening dreamily to his pleasant voice, and seeing all things with his eyes.

"It is rather a tub," he said, when they

reached the boat, which lay moored to the bank, "but it is all the better for purposes of enjoyment. I'll row you half way to Ploverton, and then we'll drift with the stream, and I'll listen whilst you tell me stories of Camford and your life there."

Nellie laughed merrily; the young man's assurance was new to her, and David never ventured to talk to her in such a fashion.

"I can tell you about Camford, of course, but there is nothing in my life that would interest you. I scarcely ever have any amusement. You see, Mr. Cross, we are a large family, without means, so that mother and I have to work very hard to keep the house going."

"But you will soon leave home. Fred told me you were engaged," with a glance at the ring upon her slender finger. "It seems a shame you should be married just now. Why, you haven't seen anything of the world, and I can hardly know your own mind yet. Oh! I beg your pardon, I ought not to have said that."

Nellie smiled, a trifle sadly.

"You said nothing that could offend me, but please talk of something else. How grand the cathedral is from this point!"

"Yes, I will take you there to-morrow. All true sons of St. Ethelreda are justly proud of the minster, and I was born here, though I've lived six years in London now."

"And which do you prefer—this place or London?"

"The latter, of course, although I have wretched health when there. I was compelled to throw up my last berth on account of it."

"And yet you are going back?"

"No; next month I am off to Geneva. I've been lucky enough to secure an appointment there in a big firm. I'm to be corresponding clerk; I shall like that."

"It must be nice to travel. Men seem to get the best of everything."

"Yes, and don't appreciate their advantages," laughing. "That is Ploverton Church over there, that small grey building with the abnormally high spire. Shall we rest here? You are casting such envious eyes at those lilies that I feel it my duty to reach you some."

"Thank you. They are so very fine! I wish I could persuade mother to come down here; it would do her a world of good."

"Should you include Mr. Knight in your invite?" with a quick look into her eyes.

She flushed crimson and played nervously with the ropes, then she said in a low voice,—

"I think not. I'm afraid it would spoil my visit."

"He is such a kill-joy? Is that what you mean?"

"No," with a twinge of remorse; "but I like to feel free again for a little while. You see if he were here I would be bound to defer to him in everything, and I want to forget while I am here that I owe anybody duty."

She spoke so naively that Swinton laughed.

"Well, we will forget him very existence," gaily. "Your visit shall be a pleasure to remember for years; that is, if you are content with simple amusements, and can endure our society for fourteen days without showing signs of being bored. Have you got enough lilies? Well, I'll row on further."

"Please, no. I had forgotten that I have letters to write. Mother will be anxious to know that I arrived quite safely."

"And Mr. Knight?"

"I thought we agreed to forget him," with a touch of petulance, and then she sat silent with drooped lids veiling her beautiful eyes; and the young fellow gazed at the fair face with growing admiration and interest.

Alas! for David, the homely, honest lover! Already the demon of discontent was stirring in the girl's heart; already she was comparing him unfavourably with the handsome *débonair* youth, into whose society she had been so unexpectedly thrown.

CHAPTER II.

"Let me know you, mine,
Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow;
Hold you and have you, and then die away
If Heaven please, with completion in my soul."

—R. Browning.

It was the middle of August, and Nellie still stayed on at St. Ethelreda, having prevailed upon her mother to grant extension of her holiday. She had written, "Aunt has kindly said she would like me to stay for the flower show, which takes place next week; and as the change is doing me good I am anxious to accept her invite. May 17?"

Of course Mrs. Paget gave consent, and so Nellie stayed on, seeing very little of her uncle, because he was a busy man, and still less of her aunt, as the children had followed "baby's" example and sickened with measles.

Mrs. Fred Paget had no thought of danger when she threw her niece so much upon Swinton's care. Nellie was engaged, and he knew it; but she did wonder a little over the girl's variable moods and fits of abstraction. Still, she was considerably startled when, one night, Mr. Paget said gravely,—

"Ann, we have been a couple of blind fools."

"I don't feel flattered; but what have we been blind to?"

"The growing attachment Swinton has for Nellie, and, upon my soul, I believe she returns it."

"Nonsense! You must be mistaken. Nellie is already engaged."

"And not very happy in her engagement I fancy—and as she seems to have no Scottish propensities I'm afraid her visit means trouble to her or Knight. I wish you would speak to her in the morning!"

"Oh! my dear, I can't. I may put thoughts into her mind that are not there now. Very likely you are mistaken—I hope you are. And, surely, she might be contented with one lover!"

"Unfortunately, Ann, he is a very homely and timid sort of fellow—not at all calculated to storm a girl's heart. I am inclined to think that in her anxiety to place Nellie beyond the fear of poverty her mother prevailed on her to accept him before she was really capable of judging for herself. David Knight will make an excellent husband—but will Nellie be content?"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! What a nuisance girls are; but if you think it my duty to speak to her I suppose I must. I wish we had not asked her here, or that Swinton was as ugly and stupid as Caliban."

"There may not be much mischief done. I trust not. If there is we must do our best to repair it, because we have really been very careless in the matter. Practically, we have thrown Nellie at Swinton's head."

"I don't see that, but I'll do my utmost to nip this fancy in the bud."

With that determination Mrs. Fred fell asleep, and with that determination she woke the next morning.

Breakfast being ended, she asked Nellie to go with her into the garden.

"A breath of fresh air will do you good," she said, by way of explanation. "I am getting quite stupid through my confinement to the nursery." She led the way to a distant arbour, and, seating herself, glanced nervously at Nellie. "You are looking remarkably well," she said at length. "Not at all as though you are pining for Mr. Knight. I wonder how he bears this separation?"

The fresh young face grew a shade paler.

"He has so much business to attend to that he would scarcely have time to miss me."

"Do you know, my dear, I have been thinking he would hardly approve your walks and boating excursions? I have been very thoughtless not to remember this."

"Why should he object?" in a low, strained voice.

"My dear, most lovers are inclined to

jealousy, and Swinton is a handsome young fellow."

"Then you would wish our walks to be discontinued?" She was very pale now.

"No, my dear! Your visit is nearly ended now, and one walk more or less cannot signify; but I thought it wise to say a word of warning."

"Thank you, aunt; you are very kind—but your warning comes too late," and suddenly she covered her face with her hands.

The elder woman threw an arm about her.

"Oh, my dear, don't tell me that! I shall never cease to reproach myself for my wicked neglect! Nellie! Nellie! Listen to me. This is only a short-lived fancy. You will soon forget; and I am quite sure you would not deserve any man wantonly. Think of Mr. Knight and his love for you!"

I have thought, aunt, but it is of no use. I do not love him, and I never shall."

"And yet," rebukingly, "you engaged yourself to him?"

"Because mother wished it; and—and I thought I would grow to care for him. Dear aunt, I am sorry to have caused you uneasiness, but I will go home to-morrow. I will not stay to worry you. I—I—oh! I dare not think what I shall say and do when once I am back at Camford."

"Do nothing rashly. Take counsel with your mother; she will be your best adviser. But I cannot let you go to-morrow; wait until Thursday. That will give you time for thought. And in the meanwhile, my dear, remember that you owe Mr. Knight some consideration; that he is a very worthy young man, and has your happiness at heart. Now I will leave you to recover your composure. And I think, Nellie, you had better walk with Swinton, as arranged this morning. You can then make him understand the state of affairs, and he will see it is both dishonourable and useless to address you."

She stooped and kissed the pale young face very gently, and went back to the house with a troubled heart, and Nellie watched her with a little bitter smile.

"They are all alike," she said to herself. "They forgot they once were young. They have no pity on me; and yet mother married in opposition to her parents' wishes. Shall I be as worldly when I am old?"

She hid her face in the fragrant blossoms and sighed wearily; but as yet no tears came to ease the aching of her heart.

She thought of Swinton with wild love and pain; of David with a feeling very akin to loathing, wondering dully what would be the end of her poor little love-story, and if this grief would kill her.

She was so unused to trouble, and oh! so impatient of it; and for the first time in her life she was honestly afraid of the loving, resolute mother, who had toiled early and late to educate her young family.

She felt inclined to run away when Swinton appeared, but he allowed her no chance.

"Have you forgotten our walk, Nellie?" he asked, eagerly.

"No. But it is early yet; there is plenty of time before us."

"Not a moment too many. I don't want to lose one minute of it now; we shall so soon have to say good-bye. How pale you are, Nellie! Are you ill?" anxiously.

"No. Let me pass, please. I will get my hat and gloves, and we will start at once."

Her manner was constrained and almost harsh, and when she rejoined him he noticed that she would not look at him.

In an uncomfortable silence they walked towards the river, Nellie wishing, with all her heart, that she might evade the bitter duty before her.

"I am going away on Thursday," she said at last, in a strange, hard way.

Swinton took her hand and laid it upon his arm.

"Not so soon, Nellie; you must stay to see the last of me. It won't be very long before I'm off now!"

"I shall not be here when you go. It is necessary for me to return at once."

"Sit down here and tell me all about it—why you have taken this sudden resolve."

"There is nothing to tell," weakly, but she sat down under a willow and looked with miserable eyes into the smooth, clear water. "Aunt says it is my duty."

"Then shirk your duty for once! You must not go, dear, I want you!"

He was lying at her feet, his eyes watching her with passionate love in their depths, and now he possessed himself of her hands.

"She has been talking to you about that other fellow. Is it not so? Nellie, my darling! my darling! why should you think of him when you love me? I know you do. But let me hear you say it, and then we will defy our kind friends to part us."

Her face fell forward, until it rested on his dark head, and he felt her tears hot amongst his curls.

"Don't cry, sweetheart," he said, catching her close. "I love you too well to let you go, and we'll be happy in spite of them all."

But Nellie was sobbing wildly now, and in an agony of pain and perplexity the young man could do nothing but kiss her again and again, finding that all power of thought or speech had for the while deserted him. But presently the girl recovered something of her composure, and dashing aside her tears, gently released herself from his hold.

"You have no right to act so, Swinton," she said.

"No right, when I love you? when you are going to be my wife? You must write to Knight and tell him you have changed your mind—"

"I dare not! oh, I dare not! Mother is so bent upon our marriage."

"But she would not have you unhappy; and it is no uncommon thing for a girl to jilt a fellow! It was a shame to persuade you into such an engagement."

"But he is so good to me," Nellie urged, weakly and regretfully.

"Who would not be?" ardently, "and such a homely fellow should be afraid to dream of winning you," with his handsome head thrown back, and an air of conscious superiority on his face. "Nellie, my dearest, be true to yourself and to me! Surely your love for me should make you strong enough to resist your mother's anger and Knight's pleadings; and in a few months I shall return for you. At the most we need but wait until the spring."

"You do not understand, and I cannot hope to make everything clear to you. Oh! Swinton, I wish we had never met! It will be so bitter to say good-bye for ever."

"It shall not be for ever! You do not love me, or you would not so calmly contemplate a separation!" he said, angrily.

"Calmly! I am afraid to think of what I know must be; and it is ungenerous to doubt my love, although, perhaps, you were justified in doing so, because I have already proved faithless to one man."

"Nellie! Nellie! I am a brute! I did not stay to choose my words. Heaven knows I meant no reproach! But, sweetheart, this sacrifice of yourself must not, shall not be! I will go to Camford and interview your mother."

"No! no! Your going would do no good. My mother is most resolute."

"To work you ill—yes!" bitterly. "But she shall never ruin your life and mine to gratify foolish whim! Nellie, promise you will be my wife, and there will be nothing to fear!"

"You forget," with grave rebuke, "I am already promised. No, Swinton, until I am free you must think of me as his wife. I will not go from this!"

"And suppose he is our enough to hold you bound?"

"Then I must bear my burden as I can, and you will soon forget. They say men always do."

And Swinton Cross found all his arguments and entreaties could not shake her fixed resolve.

"I love you!" she said, simply and earnestly. "I love you! but I have already wronged David too much for me to contemplate a further wrong. Be patient a little while. Perhaps—who knows?—we may yet be happy."

And thus matters stood when Thursday arrived.

Nellie had written her mother, confessing all the truth, and praying her to break it to David.

But this was exactly what Mrs. Paget did not intend doing until she had seen and reasoned with her daughter.

The young lovers had a short interview, from which Nellie came pale and red-eyed. At the last she had kissed Swinton in a hopeless, weary fashion, and now she was well on her way to Bamford, believing she had left all the happiness and all the love of all her life behind.

David met her at the station, and one glance at his homely, radiant face told her he was in ignorance of the change in her, and a wild dread of her mother's anger and his subsequent reproaches filled her heart.

"Were you sorry to come home?" David said, with wistful glance at the weary young face and the tremulous lips.

"One is always sorry to leave kind friends," she said, coldly.

"What have they done to you? Have you been ill? You are as white as a ghost!"

"I am well enough. Don't worry, I am only tired."

CHAPTER III.

"Look in my face. My name is Might-have-been; I am also called No More, Too Late, Farewell."

—Dante Rossetti.

Mrs. PAGET met her daughter somewhat coldly, but her coldness was more the result of anxiety than displeasure.

She was profoundly sorry for the girl, but not for an instant did she intend this engagement to be broken. Surely, with her experience, she could judge what was best for her future welfare.

Of course, David must be told, but in such a fashion that he might not take fright or offence; and, perhaps, now Nellie had said good-bye to the new lover, she would be content with the old.

In the evening she gave David a chance to further his cause by leaving him alone with Nellie, and with a troubled manner he availed himself of the opportunity.

He drew a little nearer to the wretched, remorseful girl.

"Nellie, what has come between us? Why are you so changed?" and he would have put an arm about her, but she shrank back with a hurried cry.

"Oh! I don't! I don't! I cannot bear it!"

A great dread leapt into his eyes, his face looked suddenly pinched and old.

"Do you mean," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "do you mean there is another?"

And her silence answered him too cruelly. He was a very hamble fellow, had such a poor opinion of his own merits, and such a high one of her worth, that he was more hurt than surprised.

And as he stood silent, casting about in his mind for some word of entreaty or love, Nellie stole a glance at him, and, despite her pity (for she had learned to pity him), compaled him unfavourably with Swinton Cross.

Presently he laid his hand in infinite love and compassion upon her shoulder.

"Tell me all about it, Nellie?"

And when she found he had neither reproach nor anger for her, it seemed her heart would break.

"Your kindness hurts me!" she said, chokingly. "I don't deserve it! I have behaved shamefully, wickedly to you. But, David, David, I did try to be true!"

"My dear, I believe you," with a tremor in his voice, "but it was too hard. And so, Nellie, our love has all come to nothing—there is only a good-bye to be spoken. If he loves you, you will be happy," and he turned to go, but she cried,—

"You do not understand, David! Do you suppose that, cruel and wicked as I have been, I was so wicked as to promise to marry any man whilst engaged to you?"

"Do you mean this?"

"Yes; do not I still wear your ring?"

"Then, my dear, I thank you with all my heart. You must have some pity and some friendship for me so to consider me; but, my dear, you are free now. I could not hold you to a promise rashly given, and selfishly accepted. I am not blind to my own imperfections, and now I wonder I dared to dream you could care for me!"

"Hush! hush!" she sobbed, shaken by anguish and pity, "it is I who have been always unworthy, always ungrateful! Oh! why was mother so eager to cement our engagement? It has been all a mistake—all a mistake! I wish I could make you understand how grieved and how ashamed I am. David, David, what shall I say to you?"

"Say nothing, dear heart—but—but! it is hard, yet I will try to wish you happiness with him. Don't fret, you poor child! All will come right yet!"

She slipped the ring from her finger, and laid it in his open palm.

"Take it, David, I never should have worn it. To-morrow I will return all your other gifts."

"Keep them, if he will allow that. They will help to hold me in your memory."

"Say that you forgive me," she pleaded, "and that you will forget?"

He lifted her hand and kissed it gently.

"My dear, my dear!" he said brokenly, "let there be no question of forgiveness between us."

In an agony of remorse she turned from him, and went hurriedly from the room. He stood watching until the door closed behind her; then, sinking down, threw his arms out before him upon the table, and hid his tortured face. It was thus that Mrs. Paget found him, and at once guessed the worst.

"David, don't break down like that. It will all come right! Girls are given to such fancies and caprices; but, in less than a week Nellie will be her old self!"

"She never loved me," he said, drearily, and without looking up. "Why should she? What is there in me for any woman to like or admire? Oh, it was brutal to force her into an engagement so distasteful to her!"

"You hardly know what you say," with grave coldness. "She was not coerced, and you must see my dearest wish is that she may be happy. You can make her happy, and, David, you are like a son to me!"

"But who will teach her to forget this fortunate lover? No, no, she has given me back the ring, and it is all over. You will not see me here again."

"Nonsense! Are you so poor spirited that you will resign her to a boy who does not and cannot love her as you do—a mere girlish fancy! Do you want to help her to spoil all her life? Why, in a few years she would despise and loathe this butterfly lover, and blame you that you set her free."

He looked up then, hope in his eyes, a light on his face.

"Do you mean that, mother?" (she had been as a mother even to him).

"Yes, I do; and I promise I will use no force to bring about what you and I desire. Give Nellie a week of quiet thought, and then, if she does not regret her folly I shall be a very false prophet. Leave her to me. Oh! yes, I will be kind. Do I not love her? And now go, but come next Thursday, and if you find Nellie with us in the parlour you will know, without one word, that all is well."

And when he had gone she stood a moment

in thought, then went upstairs and knocked at Nellie's door. The girl opened it slowly. She was terribly white and haggard, but she was quite calm.

Mrs. Paget drew her to the bed, and sat down beside her, one arm about her waist.

"My dear," she said, quietly, "your letter told me so little, let me hear all now."

She was so kind, so tender, that Nellie's drooping courage revived, and she began her story with her face hidden on her mother's breast. Mrs. Paget listened in silence until the halting, timid voice died out, then she said,—

"And do you think, my dear, any honourable man, any man who respected you, would have dared to address you, knowing you were already engaged?"

It was a cruel thing to say, and it hurt her to say it, but in some way she was determined to disenchant Nellie, and so "must be cruel to be kind."

The girl shivered violently, but made no response, and the mother went on,—

"This so-called love has been of too rapid a growth to be enduring; in six months each would be weary of the other. And, Nellie, so solemn a promise as yours to David should not be lightly and heartlessly broken. Then, too, supposing I consented to an engagement between you and Mr. Cross, it would be long before you could marry; and you are well aware, my dear, how great a struggle it is for me to provide for you all. As David's wife you could materially assist your brothers and sisters."

She said a great deal more in the same strain, then, kissing Nellie, left her to reflect upon her advice and entreaties. Throughout the week it was the same, until the poor girl began to regard herself as wicked and ungrateful, and struggled with her misplaced love with all her strength. So Wednesday came, and then Mrs. Paget called her to her own room.

"Nellie, have you determined what to say to David to-morrow?"

The white face grew yet whiter, the great eyes wore a look of pain and dread.

"I will do as you wish, mother. But oh, mother! oh, mother! You have broken my heart!"

Mrs. Paget waited until she had grown calmer, then said,—

"You must acquaint Mr. Cross with your decision; it would be wrong to keep him in ignorance."

"Everything is wrong," bitterly. "I have deceived both David and Swinton, and if either forgives me it will be more than I dare hope."

She wrote her note, a pitiful little message, breathing of love and sorrow.

"You must forget you ever knew me, or that I ever confessed I loved you. My mother has shown me how selfish and wicked I should be to break my word to David, so I am going to marry him if he still wishes it. You must not try to see me any more; it would do no good now, as I am resolved. Try to think as kindly of me as you can, and, remember, my earnest prayer will be that you may forget me and be happy."

That was all. A pitiful ending to a summer dream, thought Nellie, as her tears fell fast on the written words. She could not tell how she spent the long hours between the sending of her letter and David's coming. She was resolute now, but her heart was hard against her lover, and she was not a little inclined to blame him for her mother's share in the matter; and once she said, aloud,

"I almost wish him dead, then I might be happy," then she grew ashamed and reproached herself in no measured terms.

On Thursday she dressed with less care than usual, and joining her mother and sister sat by an open window, apparently engaged in sewing. Then David came in, and one look at the haggard face, the sunken eyes, melted her to pity.

"David," Mrs. Paget said, cheerfully, "I

was no false prophet. Nellie has thought seriously of what a rupture with you means, and if you can forgive and overlook her folly she is content matters should be as they were. Come, Hariot, they will settle their differences best without us."

Then Nellie found herself alone with her lover, afraid and ashamed to look at him. He spoke very gently, but with an evident effort.

"Is this true, Nellie?"

"Yes," she answered, without an upward glance. "Please try to forgive me."

But he was not satisfied yet.

"I hate to say it, dear, but you are not marrying me for a home, and to help your mother! I could not take you on such terms, although it spoiled my life to let you go. And unless, dear, you are quite sure of your own feelings, we had best remain apart. I could not bear such another time of trial."

"I am quite sure," she said, wearily, "it is for my happiness to marry you," half unconsciously repeating the words her mother had so often used during this long slow week.

"You are not acting under coercion?"

"No, no! Why will you not believe me?" and then he caught her to him, and kissed her wildly, whilst her heart cried out to him to desist. But she had chosen her path, and could not go back now, and he had a right to embrace her if he would.

He drew her down beside him, and spoke of the time when they would be married in an anxious, questioning tone, as if not quite sure of her acquiescence; and she listened with veiled eyes and drooped head. And when he said it seemed an unfair thing to burden her so early with matrimonial cares—so they would wait a year before they began life together—she could have cried aloud for thankfulness. She was very quiet, but he was content. He asked nothing from her but her love, and she, poor child, played her part as best she could, and wished herself dead.

The next morning a letter reached her from Swinton, in which he said,—

"I cannot think you will so heartlessly throw me over; you cannot mean that we must part for all time. Oh Heaven! anything but that. Nellie, my darling Nell! wait a little while until I can claim you for my wife. Trust me, sweetheart, we shall yet be happy. To-morrow I leave for Geneva, and unless a message reaches me before I start I shall know you have been utterly false, and shall curse the day we met."

"Mother! mother!" she cried, "why have you made me do this thing? You break my heart. I am like a sheep offered for sacrifice! Let me write him some word of comfort. Oh! how cruel you are to refuse," and weeping wildly she threw herself on her bed.

The next day Swinton started for Geneva, at enmity with the world and Nellie, and Mrs. Paget sighed relievedly as she thought her daughter's future assured. It would have broken her heart could she have seen what misery she was laying up for her.

CHAPTER IV.

"It seems so hard to think for us
Not even hope can soften woe;
'Tis cruel to have lost her thus,
I loved her so! I loved her so!"

—Whyte Melville.

At first, after their reconciliation, Nellie was variable in moods, extravagantly gay, or intensely wretched. Often and often she tried David's love and patience sorely; but he never reproached her, and soon the natural sweetness of her temper reasserted itself, and from tolerating him she grew to like his society.

She was of the clinging, affectionate type of woman, and kindness was her necessary food; sometimes still a vague discontent stirred her heart. Once and again a longing desire to seek out Swinton, and pray him to forgive her be-

cause of her love, made her restless and supremely wretched.

But as the months wore by her pain settled into a dull ache, which grew fainter still as the time of her wedding approached.

But there was one noticeable thing about her—she had none of the pretty shyness, the timid happiness, of most girls in her position. She spoke of her approaching marriage as of an everyday affair, talked calmly of the arrangements made by David for her comfort; and scarcely a blush rose to her cheeks—certainly no added light came into her eyes—as she heard him planning what they would do in the near future.

The wedding-day dawned, bright and intensely hot, and Nellie, submitting herself to her mother's hands, found herself carefully and elaborately dressed. She was quite composed enough to take pleasure in her own appearance—the dainty lavender silk with its shimmering folds, the trim little bonnet which had cost her mother more than she could well afford.

No guests were invited, David asking that the wedding should be a very quiet one; but Harriet looked nicely in her bridesmaid's dress of cream, with its dashes of crimson, and "Uncle Fred" had come down to give away the bride.

Nellie scarcely realised all she was promising, went through the ordeal so quietly and naturally that "Uncle Fred" congratulated her on her "good sense," and did not understand that had she loved David she would scarcely have been so composed.

The wedding-party adjourned to Mrs. Paget's, where a quiet, pleasant day was spent; and then David carried his bride off to the dainty home he had prepared for her.

It was small and compact, and not an article it contained had been purchased without Nellie's approval. Now, as she looked round, a flush of pride and pleasure came over her face. She turned suddenly to her husband and lifted her face to be kissed.

"You have been too good to me," she cried, "and it shall be my work to make you happy."

"You have done that already, Nellie," he answered, with grave tenderness.

So Nellie began her new life, and was too busy for idle regrets—too true and pure a woman to allow her thoughts to rove to Swinton, and having her time fully occupied half forgot the past.

Each day David unconsciously showed her some new beauty in his character, paid her some new tribute of love, and she said to herself, "I am happy. I am genuinely fond of him," and did not guess how necessary he was growing to her.

Mrs. Paget was delighted at the success of her venture, often speaking to Harriet of her foresight and prudence.

The months wore on, and Nellie said she felt quite "like an old married woman," and ordered her house wisely and well, anxious in all things to please her husband, who, all unknown to herself, was daily growing dearer.

And thus matters stood when one day Mrs. Fred Paget was considerably startled by hearing Swinton announced.

"Why, Swinton," she cried, "how glad I am to see you! Why did you not write so that we could prepare for you? How pleased Fred will be!"

"If he gives me half as hearty a greeting as you have done I shall be satisfied," laughed the young man; "but, Ann, my dear, I am frightfully hungry."

"I think that is your normal condition," laughing; "but I'll go foraging and bring you the best I can find." She glanced curiously at him, for now the flush of excitement had died away from his face she saw how aged he was. "You have been ill?" she said, kindly.

"No, only slightly indisposed, and I have had a long journey. I can assure you, Ann, I lost no time in coming down here."

"I am duly flattered," she said, beginning

to spread a snowy cloth, whilst a maid brought in the remains of a pigeon-pie and a foaming tankard of ale. "It seems a great while since you were here?"

"More than two years. Nellie was with you then. Of course, she is married now?"

"Yes. I wrote you word at the time, but I daresay you have forgotten that, as you have outgrown your *penchant* for my pretty niece. We shall hear soon that you have turned Benedict!"

"I think not," carelessly. "I like my freedom. And is Nellie well and happy?"

"Both. David is devoted to her, and I am sure she considers herself a fortunate girl."

Swinton made no reply; but Mrs. Paget saw his face darken, and leaning forward, said,—

"Surely, you don't grudge her her happiness? You are not so ungenerous?"

"I am glad she is so content," he answered, bitterly. "She has found it easy to forget."

"If you are still sore about what you please to call your rejection I hope you will not attempt to see her. It would be a shame to disturb her peace."

"Oh, don't be afraid, Ann. I have no wish to see her; and you must make some allowance for a disappointed fellow. You know I was honestly fond of her, but I am not the sort of character to cry for the moon, and I have too much work always to brood over any trouble past or present."

But Mrs. Fred was strangely uneasy in a vague way, and wished he had not returned. That night she said to her husband anxiously,

"Do you think Swinton is improved?"

"No, I don't, Ann," frankly. "I am disappointed in him. His moral tone isn't as high as I could wish. Might is evidently right with him, and he seems only to have one idea, and that is to 'make haste to grow rich.'"

"If that is his worst fault I shall not complain," said Mrs. Fred, and refused to explain her words, but she watched Swinton narrowly in the days which followed.

His manner was marked by a forced gaiety, a bitter cynicism foreign to her former experience of him, a general contempt for women and their ways. One day he said, carelessly,—

"I suppose Mrs. Knight is quite enamoured with her lord and master?"

"If she is not she ought to be," Mrs. Fred answered, warmly. "He is a model man without being a prig. Any good woman would be won by his worth and devotion."

He said no more, but, pondering over her words, came to the conclusion that she had given an evasive answer because she knew Nellie did not really love David, and resolved in his mind that he would learn the truth from his old love herself.

So, a day or two later, he announced his intention of "running up to town," saying there were some "good things on at the theatres," and the change would be pleasant.

Still with that uneasy feeling in her heart, Mrs. Fred packed his portmanteau, and walked with him to the station to satisfy herself he was really going to town. She hated herself when he showed her his ticket to King's Cross, and still she doubted him.

"I'll drop you a line," he said, at parting, "unless I find London too deserted to stay in it. I'm an erratic fellow at best, and no one can judge what my next movement will be, any more than I can myself."

True to his word he wrote, saying he was having a good time, and should not return to St. Ethelreda for a few days; then, having posted his letter, packed his valise and took train to Cambridge.

He hardly knew why he was going, or what he intended doing when he reached the town, save that at any cost he would see Nellie and judge for himself whether she was happy or no.

But it was too late to visit her when he arrived, so he secured comfortable apartments, and waited with some impatience for the next day.

It came at last, bright and hot, and Swinton set out to discover his old love's home. It was not very difficult task, the house standing a little back from one of the principal thoroughfares. It was surrounded by a high wall overlooked by splendid chestnuts; and, as Swinton glanced through the open gate, he saw such a cosy, pretty place, so suggestive of peace and love, that a fierce envy and hatred filled his heart.

He passed in, and up the trim path without so much as a glance at Nellie's flowers, and ringing, sent in his card.

Nellie had been sitting at work, and when she read his name started up, very pale and agitated. Why had he come to molest her? And what would David say to this unexpected visit? And then, remembering how once she had confessed she loved this man, she blushed brightly, and Swinton, finding her confused, construed her manner as he wished.

"You have taken me by surprise," she said, gently, motioning him to a chair. "I did not even know you were in England."

"I am fond of surprising folks. I started Ann almost out of her senses, and now she believes I am in London, and will be vexed, indeed, if she learns I have been here."

"I see no reason for vexation," Nellie said, nervously, and looked down at her work.

"Do not you? She will say I had no right to recall myself to your memory, but I could not leave England without seeing you, Nell, although you so soon and so cruelly forgot me."

She rose, trembling a little, but with a certain dignity of mien new to her.

"Mr. Cross, you do wrong to recall the past. I cannot listen to you. It would be a sin against my husband."

An ugly sneer disfigured his face.

"There was a time when you did not so consider him."

"True, and I am not likely to forget my ingratitude and faithlessness," she answered, gravely. "Mr. Cross, it is unmanly to taunt me."

"You drive me to it," sullenly. "And, Nell, whatever you do now you loved me then."

The bright blood stained cheek and throat, and her eyes drooped.

"I will not talk of these things, and, unless you can meet me as an ordinary acquaintance, I must decline to receive you again."

"Have you forgotten everything?" he cried, heartbrokenly. "How madly you sobbed when we said good-bye?—how you vowed you should never love me less?"

"I am ashamed to remember these things."

"What! Do you mean you are so changed that you love David Knight?"

And suddenly her heart awoke to the knowledge that her husband was dearer to her than all the world beside.

"I do love him!" but the man before her did not believe her.

"Your sense of duty forces you to lie to me; but you cannot deceive me. I will not believe you could so cruelly and wickedly change to me. Nellie, my darling! my darling! give me some kind word!"

"How dare you talk to me thus?" she asked, in angry amazement. "I should be sacred to you, being a wife. Pray go, before you offend beyond forgiveness."

"I will not go until you tell me all the truth. As sure as there is a Heaven above you loved me once, and I refuse to think you have transferred your affection to any other. I have thought of you—loved you and hated you by turns—these two long years. I have tried to forget you and failed. Why did you confess so much if you meant to give so little?"

"Apparently you forgot I was engaged to David before we ever met, and that you had no right to address me as you did. I do not blame you, I was equally erring; but he nobly forgave me."

And then the young voice faltered, and the sweet eyes filled with tears. But after a pause she went on bravely,—

"And now, if you ever loved me—if you have any vestige of esteem for me—I ask you to go, and never to seek me out again. I will not risk loss of happiness and good report for your sake."

"Say, rather, you love the good things of life too well to give them up," bitterly. "You women are all alike, all alike! incapable of constancy."

"Go!" she said, in a low, stern voice. "I will not hear you!"

He sprang to her side, caught her in his arms, and kissed her!

CHAPTER V.

"My wife! my wife! What wife? I have no wife!" —*Shakespeare.*

With a low cry of pain and shame Nellie wrenched herself from him, and sinking upon a couch sobbed bitterly.

"David would never so have insulted a woman! I am ashamed to remember that once I held you dear! I shall always be ashamed."

"Stop!" he said, harshly, "do not go too far; do not add to your former wanton cruelty by further reproaches! Nellie, of what use is this feigned anger? Do you suppose I am so easily duped?" Then he sank on his knees beside her. "Say you pity me—for pity is akin to love. Sweetheart!—my sweetheart, despite all that has gone—how can you be so hard with me?"

"Oh, go away!" she cried, entreatingly; "go away before David returns. I am frightened. If ever you cared for me leave me now, Swinton!"

Outside a man stood as though turned to stone. His face was ghastly, his eyes wild, and in his great tender, honest heart rose a wild cry.

"False! False! False! And I loved her so!"

Through the open door he saw his rival's face, flushed and eager.

"I will not leave you! I have forgotten to be merciful! I only remember I love you, and have lost you! Oh! no! no!—not lost you! Nellie, by our mutual passion I pray you to come with me! Away from England we shall be happy!"

The listener stirred, shivered, then swiftly and silently moved from the door.

Oh! if he had but stayed to hear his wife's reply!

Nellie rose suddenly, her face as white as though Death had set his seal upon it, her eyes darkened by outraged purity and pride.

"You have said too much! Oh! how have I erred to be so low in your esteem? I told you truly that you were no more than a friend to me. But had I loved you until this very hour your last words would have changed that love to scorn! I thank Heaven that I am not bound to you by any ties; had I been, then I could only have been wretched, knowing you as you are."

And something in her manner carried conviction to his heart and brain.

With an imprecation he turned from her.

"You are falser than I believed a woman could be! but you will live to regret your inconstancy! As sure as there is a Heaven above us, I will turn your husband's heart from you!"

"You cannot!" she retorted, with scorn; "and I myself shall confess all the truth to him on his return. No deception shall ever raise a barrier between us!"

You are scarcely wise to trust him so far. A jealous man does not listen to reason!" and with those words he moved to the door; there he paused a moment to look at her, the pale, cold face, the scornful, condemning eyes. Then he went out, and only once again in all her life would Nellie see him.

When he had gone, a complete reaction set in, and for very long she lay weeping helplessly and quietly. Then she began to wonder over

David's long absence, and finally dispatched the maid to the office in search of him.

The girl returned in a few minutes, with a message to the effect that master was busy, and could not leave the office. Mistress was not to "wait dinner for him."

Nellie wandered miserably through the house, fearing, she scarcely knew what, praying that Swinton might not see David before her confession was made.

Now that she knew his true nature she wondered at her past folly, and vowed, by years of loving devotion to David, to make amends for it.

Meanwhile, David sat alone in his office, his head bowed in his hands, wrestling with a very madness of agony and despair. If only he could free her, and so save her from the horrible sin she contemplated! If only he were dead! Would she be sorry then? Would she understand at last how dearly he had prized her?

There was one way by which he could save her from sin. Was he brave enough to take it? Suppose he lifted his hand against himself? He did not wince from the thought; but as he lifted his heavy eyes they lit upon a life insurance policy—his own. By committing suicide he would rob Nellie of five hundred pounds, and he had little else to leave her. No, no! However and whenever he died, there must be no doubt as to the manner of his death, and he began to devise schemes by which she might benefit. But none of them were perfect—all of them were open to some grave objection. He would think more clearly when he was away; and there were seventy-five pounds at the bank for Nellie's present wants.

"He must go away!" that was the thought which haunted him. He could never see her again—this poor girl he called wife, who had been coerced into a hateful marriage.

There was no anger in his heart against her, only pity and pardon. All his rage was spent upon Swinton, the man who had dared urge dishonorable proposals to her. And then he prayed Heaven in its infinite mercy had made her strong to refuse his plea; and, finally, as it grew dusk, he rose, locked the office, and went out.

He had not meant to see his wife again, but a great yearning came over him to look once more at the dear face he loved, and to hear the low tones of her voice. So he beat his steps towards the house which would know him no more; and, entering wearily, was met by the maid.

"Mistress is lying down, sir," she said. "She has not been well all day."

He stole upstairs to her room. She was sleeping quietly as a little child.

With throbbing heart and misty eyes he bent over her, and kissed her once. She did not stir or wake, and he stole out of her presence, believing he had looked his last upon her.

Then he put a few necessary articles together, and wrote a little note, which he gave to the maid, saying,—

"Tell your mistress I shall not be home to-night, and this will explain the reason for my absence."

Then he let himself out, and, groaning heavily, turned his back upon wife and home and love.

He went on steadily until he reached the railway station.

A porter took his modest luggage from him.

"Where for, sir?"

He started, and roused himself.

"Where does the next train go?"

"To Bristol, sir. She starts in fifteen minutes."

"That will do," and the man's look of qualified surprise was utterly lost upon him.

He took a third-class ticket, and waited with dreary patience for the signal to start, wondering all the while if Nellie would grieve over his departure, or if she would be glad of the freedom purchased by the sacrifice of his whole life's joy.

He was very far on his way, indeed, when Nelly woke to find the little maid by her bedside.

"Master left this for you, ma'am, and said you were not to expect him back to-night."

"Where did you see your master? Has he been home at all since I slept?"

"Yes, ma'am, but he didn't stay long," and the girl withdrew, leaving Nellie a prey to doubts and fears. She tore open the envelope with trembling fingers, and as she read a mist came before her eyes, and her heart seemed like to choke her with its wild beatings.

"I heard Swinton Cross propose flight to you. I dared not stay to hear your reply. It is enough for me to know I never had your love; but oh! wife, how could you be so deceptive? I am going away, and you will be glad that I have relieved you of my presence. I wish with all my heart I could free you from a marriage so distasteful to you. I do not reproach you, my dear; you were so young, and I so eager to have and hold you as my own. But I pray you, do not forget your purity; do not stain your soul and darken your life with the foul crime he dared name."

"Get your uncle to dispose of the business; and what is left, after all claims are satisfied, is unreservedly yours, as also the little I have banked. If I prosper I will remit you an allowance from time to time; but of me you will never hear until I am dead!"

"DAVID."

That was all, and the blow was so sharp, so sudden, that the wretched young creature could not quite realize the extent of her calamity, could neither cry nor moan. She sat up with one hand pressed to her brow, her eyes wide and dilated, and the slow minutes wore by laden with agony.

It was getting very late, the streets were growing quiet, and still she sat there in her dumb despair until aroused by the maid's voice begging permission to go to bed.

"Yes, go by all means," she said, in so calm a voice that she herself was surprised; and when she was quite sure the girl slept she rose, and taking up her hat went out and walked in a dazed way to her mother's. Mrs. Paget was not a little surprised and alarmed when she opened the door to admit her.

"Why, Nellie, what has happened? Is David ill?"

"Read it," she said, and put the letter into her hand, "read it, mother."

Hariot, looking over her shoulder, cried,—

"Oh, Nellie! Nellie! what have you done? All Camford will know it to-morrow. How could you be so wicked as to meet Swinton Cross?"

She listened in a dazed, apathetic way, until Hariot's reproaches and her mother's questions ceased, then quite quietly told them all that had passed.

"Don't you care? Are you senseless and shameless that you speak so calmly?"

She turned her heavy eyes upon Hariot,—

"I don't know," she said, heavily, "I feel numb; perhaps to-morrow I shall understand it better."

The mother took her in her arms, weeping bitterly, inwardly reproaching herself that she had compassed this marriage, but she could not refrain from saying,—

"Was he not good and kind enough to win your love? Oh, Nellie, how could you bring this shame upon us?"

"Shame!" she echoed, strangely. "Is it shame? Mother, be kind to me. I loved him, and he is gone! Oh! if he had but heard my answer to Swinton, if he had but waited for an explanation." Then she started up, and began hurriedly to fasten her wrap about her throat.

"Where are you going? What do you intend doing?"

"I am going home, perhaps I shall find him there? Perhaps he has already repented his hasty judgment. No mother, you need not come with me. I would like best to be alone," but Mrs. Paget insisted upon going

with her. She was afraid that the poor child would commit some rash and irremediable act, although, indeed, no thought of self-destruction visited her distraught mind.

All through the long night the two women kept watch, but vainly; and when morning dawned Mrs. Paget burst into a passionate flood of tears, wildly denouncing David. Nellie turned one reproachful glance upon her.

"He is my husband," she said, coldly, "and I wronged him," and the elder woman was silenced.

Never had the young wife so loved her lord as now—never had she so highly prized his love and tenderness. A great dread tore at her heart lest he was lost to her for ever, and still she could not cry. Another weary, weary day passed and still no news of David; and then Mrs. Paget telegraphed for Uncle Fred, who answered her summons promptly.

His indignation exceeded all bounds when he learned the story of the rupture, and he swore solemnly Swinton Cross should never again darken his doors.

He was full of pity for the hapless husband and wife, and his generous kindness touched Nellie as nothing else had done since David's flight. He wrote, acquainting his wife with the whole sad story, and when Swinton returned, a few days later, to St. Ethelreda he found Tenby House closed against him.

Day followed day, and at last Uncle Fred decided to offer David's business for sale; and a rival accountant purchasing it, Nellie insisted that the money realised should be added to the little sum lying at the bank.

"I will never touch a penny of it," she said, quietly. "I deserved no such consideration from him. I will work for my bread," and from that condition she would not go. The pleasant home his love had made so dear was broken up, the household goods disposed of, and the pale young wife bore it all calmly and dry-eyed.

One day Uncle Fred gave her a letter. "I think," he said, "gravely, "it is from Swinton."

She dropped it as though it burned her. "Take it away," she cried, in a perfect passion of rage and hate. "Take it away, I will not hear one word from him," and suddenly covering her face with her hands, she burst into wildest tears.

And perhaps this outburst saved her reason. Two days later Uncle Fred carried her off to St. Ethelreda "for a change," adding "together we can plan your future, and Ann will be a great help and comfort to you."

CHAPTER VI.

"In his eyes

A ravening hunger lived that seemed to cry
Urgently for its own."

—Helen Matthes.

DAVID had counted upon obtaining work very easily in such a busy place as Bristol; but he was doomed to disappointment and failure. No one needed him, the market was overstocked with clerks, young and old, there was no room for him; and his retiring, almost timid, bearing did not recommend him to energetic business men.

Slowly and surely his little stock of money wasted, and although he practised strictest economy he soon stood face to face with want.

One by one he disposed of such articles as he could spare, and still he found no employment. Despairing and miserable he sat in his poor little room, pondering over his future—the future so bleak and desolate, so uncheered by love and faith, when some one knocked at the door, and, without waiting a reply, entered.

David looked wearily round, and found his visitor was a man, who, with his wife, occupied the next room.

"What is it?" he asked dully, as the man advanced.

"Well mate, I heard of a job, and thought

of you at once; but I don't know as you'll care to take it; it ain't what you've been used to."

"I don't care what it is!" David said eagerly, "I am not afraid of work."

"I was thinking, p'raps your strength wasn't much to speak of," with a glance at the slim, spare figure, "but maybe you're stronger than you look."

"Oh, yes, I'm very strong; and if I don't get work I must starve!"

"That's about the size of it, I guess. Well, mate, there's an odd job man wanted at the warehouse where I am, and I spoke to the foreman about you. He's willing to give you a trial; but I warn you the hours are long, and the pay small, the work hard; still you're not compelled to stay if you don't like it."

"I shall stay if I am lucky enough to get the post," David said, firmly. "Where is it?"

"Just down by the quay; and if you like to walk down with me in the morning; p'raps you can get to work at once. The foreman's sharp, but not a bad sort when you know him. Well, good-night, mate. Be ready at half-past five sharp, and the missus'll give you a cup of tea before you go."

He went blundering out, leaving David to his own sad and bitter reflections.

"Nellie! Nellie!" he groaned, "to what privation and indignities you have condemned me! Oh, wife! oh, wife! if you could but have loved me! If only I could know you are safe—and—and content!" and then he broke utterly down, as he remembered all the dreams he had dreamed, all her seeming devotion, her pretty, caressing ways. He thought of her as still living and moving in that dear home he had forsaken, where he had known such bliss and such content as rarely come to men.

He saw her pale with the pain of parting from the man who had won her heart to his undoing. She was bowed down with sorrow that was not for her lord. And then he dared pursue this train of thought no longer, lest he should go mad. Only through the silence of the room was groaned a prayer, "Heaven bless her, and make her glad!"

He threw himself on his bed and fell into a heavy slumber, from which he woke unrefreshed and despondent.

He had scarcely dressed when Mrs. Adams, his new friend's wife, brought him a cup of tea and some thick slices of bread-and-butter, telling him he must hurry over his meal, as Nat was almost ready.

That day was the beginning of a dreary, toilsome time. Often and often he was so worn, so weary, that it seemed he could but lie down and die.

The work was so uncongenial, his companions of a type hitherto unknown to him.

At first they eyed him askance, or openly ridiculed his appearance and manners; but soon contempt and suspicion were succeeded by liking and respect—the new-comer was always so ready to help another, so quiet, so inoffensive, that they let him go his way in peace, and it was tacitly understood that no one should molest "little Dave."

The months of grief and privation were already leaving a mark upon him. He was changed and aged beyond conception; the homely face was lined with care, the eyes sunken, and he walked like one who carried a heavy burden.

But no complaints ever broke from him, and his story was known only to himself, although it was shrewdly guessed that "little Dave" had seen better days, and had suffered some heavy blow.

"Depend upon it, mates," said Adams, one day, "he ain't here through his own fault. He's next door to a saint, if you ask my opinion. He'd go a mile out of his way to do a kind thing, or speak a word of comfort to a poor body. And little as he's got of his own, he'll always spare something for a body poorer than himself."

"That's so," said another, heartily, "though

you'd never think it to look at him; but handsome is as handsome does, is my mother."

So in patience he trod the rugged way, asking nothing, hoping nothing, craving nothing save news of Nellie.

Meanwhile, she was duly installed at Tenby House, Mrs. Fred declaring the children were too many for her; and as Nellie refused to eat the bread of charity, she taught her young cousins such accomplishments as she had, and kept their wardrobes in repair.

She, too, was changed. All her pretty winsome ways had vanished, and the pale, grave young wife was but the ghost of the girl who had won David's love. All her efforts to discover her husband had proved fruitless, and her passionate heart rose in hot revolt at the bitterness of her lot.

"I shall never be happy again," she said, "for he will never forgive me or return—David! David! I wish I had died before I so hurt you, and so lost your love. I wish I were dead!"

But she was young and strong, and grief does not often kill.

So winter came and went, and spring gladdened all the earth, spoke of new hope to all "save me," thought poor David, as he plodded wearily home.

He was more than usually sad that day, having lately stood beside the deathbed of a fellow-worker.

A virulent fever was rife in the city, and in those crowded lanes and courts where the poor herded together the mortality was fearful.

One after another was stricken down—men, women, and little children—too many of them never to rise again.

And in all this time David had pursued his quiet way, going from house to house with words of comfort and kindly deeds not easily to be forgotten.

He had neither fear nor care for himself; life held no charm for him, and death no dread. If the prayers of thankful hearts could have blessed him he had been blessed indeed; but he was hopeless of any good thing.

To-night, as he went towards that wretched place called home, head and heart alike were heavy, and a strange numbness crept over his body.

"I am tired," he thought, unwilling to imagine himself ill, "a night's rest will restore me."

He was walking down Wine-street, pushing his way through the motley crowd of pedestrians, when a man brushed by him roughly, then, turning, apologised in quick, sharp fashion, and went on his way once more, heedless of the wild, white face, the startled agonised eyes bent upon him.

David had fallen against a wall, and stood staring after him, forgetful of everything around.

"Oh Heaven!" he groaned, "it is he! Nellie! Nellie! my darling! where are you?"

A young girl pausing, looked pitifully at him, then said in a musical voice, made sweeter by the soft and pretty brogue,—

"Are you ill, poor fellow? Can I do anything for you?"

He roused himself from the stupor into which he had fallen.

"I am not ill. But tell me which way he went?"

She looked perplexedly at him.

"Who is it you want?"

"I beg your pardon," he said, gently, "I forgot; you could not know. Thank you; I am quite well, but I was startled," and lifting his hat (much to her astonishment) he crept homewards.

It was growing dark when he stumbled up the rickety stairs. But he knew every step of the way now through long use.

Kindly Mrs. Adams tapped at his door, asking if she should make tea for him; and when she caught sight of the wan face and heavy eyes she cried out,—

Oct. 13, 1888.

"Dear, dear, sir! you are ill. Bless us and save us! it is the fever on you!"

David rose, his face flushing, and a sudden wild light in his eyes.

"I must go away. They will take me in at the hospital. I cannot stay. I—" but his voice broke suddenly down, and without warning he fell heavily to the floor.

It was quite late when he recovered consciousness, to find Mrs. Adams and a doctor bending over him anxiously.

He tried to raise himself, but failed.

"Let me go away," he pleaded, and even to himself his voice sounded faint and far away.

"Lie still," the doctor said, authoritatively, "lie still. It is impossible to move you." Then to Mrs. Adams, "You have a hard time before you, he has got the fever badly. If he has any friends write for them."

"Friends!" thought the sick man, sorrowfully, as he turned his face to the wall, "what friends had he?"

Then he tried to understand what the woman said, and after a great effort he succeeded.

She was asking if there was no one whom he wished to see, no one to whom he would send a message.

"Yes, yes!" he whispered, "there is one; but you must wait until I am dead. Then tell her she is free; that—that—" and his mind began to wander.

"But her name? Tell it me quick!"

She pleaded to deaf ears, and sorrowfully she looked up at the doctor.

"It's of no use, sir, we don't know a word I say. Poor soul! it do seem hard"—and she wiped away a tear—"to die here, and unbeknown to his friends, too."

But David was not to die, although for many days his life hung by a thread, and Mrs. Adams feared each moment would be his last. His fellow-workers came and went with soft steps and hushed voices to inquire "for little Dave, poor old Dave!" and, hoping for the best, contrived to perform his duties amongst themselves so that his post might remain open until he could return.

And one day they learned that he was conscious, although not yet pronounced out of danger, and there was hearty rejoicing among them.

Mrs. Adams seized the opportunity to ask, "Is there no one I can send for, sir (she never lost her respect for this hapless young man)?

He looked dreamily at her, then answered, "If I die I would like one to know of it; but she must not hear the news too suddenly. Write down 'Mrs. Paget, Freda-street, Camford'; but do not write until the breath is out of my body."

Slowly, slowly he crept back to life, despite his strong desire for death; and when he was able to walk they led him by easy stages to some spot from whence the trams started for the Downs, and there breathing new life with each breath he gradually recovered some likeness to his own self. But there were streaks of grey in the fair hair, and heavy lines scored upon his brow—sign and seal of suffering.

Later on he returned to the warehouse, to be almost overwhelmed by the rough kindness of the men, their ever ready aid, and joy at receiving him once again into their midst.

Towards the close of the summer other and better remunerated work was found for him; but he did not change his lodging for a better, or in any way alter his line of life. He was happier, he said, amongst those humble friends than he could be elsewhere. And, after all, fifteen shillings a-week did not make him a rich man; so he stayed with those he had befriended, whose love and faith he had so fully tested.

And "a whole year of bud and bloom and snow" had passed since he stood outside a door, and learned that "joy was not for him!"

CHAPTER VII.

"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

AUTUMN came with its gorgeous blooms, its changing foliage, and David wondered a little how many seasons he would watch coming and going before the last chapter of life ended.

He was sitting one Sunday evening in the open doorway, enjoying the quiet of the place, the motley inhabitants of the court having gone out for their weekly "airing," leaving him to the solitude he loved. He was brooding, too, over the bitter-sweet past, when his reverie was broken through by the sound of hurrying footsteps.

The next moment a man dashed past him, crying "Save me!" and crouched down in the darkened passage.

David was not quick to plan, but when he saw the officers of law hurrying after the fugitive, he resolved, right or wrong, to save the poor wretch who had cast himself upon his mercy and honour.

One of his pursuers paused when he saw David, and said sharply, "Where has he gone? You must have seen him?"

"Straight through the court, and up the steps," David said, slowly and deliberately, and without further parley the men hurried on. Then he turned to the fugitive, whose face he could not see for the gathering dusk.

"You are not safe here!" he said, "come with me to my room. There you will tell me how I can help you, and perhaps of what crime you are charged!"

Without a word the other followed him up the steep stairs, panting for breath, and starting at every sound. Unlocking the door, David bade him enter, and began to search for lights.

"My good friend!" said his visitor, in a patronising tone, "you shall not suffer because of your charity to me. I am not too poor to pay you well for silence and shelter!"

The hot blood rushed to David's face as he listened to the voice, which sounded strangely familiar; but he said quietly,—

"I ask no reward. I have only done as I would be done by. Sit down, please, whilst I get a light!"

The accoutrements were refined, the voice pleasant though sad, and as he struck a match the other glanced inquisitively at him, seeing only a homely figure clad in fustian. But as David held the candle high and turned his regard upon him, he cried out sharply, "Great heaven! trapped!" and made for the door; but his host was before him and barred his passage.

"So it is, Swinton Cross," he said, in a dull, laboured voice. "It is indeed you!"

"Yes, it is I. Now what are you going to do?" asked Swinton, sullenly.

"I do not know," in the same heavy way, "Tell me, where is my wife?"

"How should I know? I have not seen her since that day at Camford."

"Is this true? If you lie to me now it will be worse for you."

"You mean you will give me up to justice?"

"No. I mean it is in my heart to avenge my wrongs."

"I have done you no harm, although I meant nothing very good to you when I sought out Nellie. What could I do when she told me she loved you with all her heart, and bade me never try to see her any more? Oh, yes! She was false, but not to you."

David gasped for breath. Could it be true that all this long while he had misjudged his wife, made for himself a burden well-nigh too heavy to bear?

"Do not lie to me," he said, in a suppressed tone. "I am not inclined to mercy."

"I am speaking truth now, although it seems incredible that any woman in possession of her senses should prefer you to me. But it was so, and I meant to be revenged on her, and for that purpose loitered about Camford until the next day. I even looked in upon you at your office, but thought I could wait a while.

On the next day I heard you were gone, and I

went back to St. Ethelreda, to be met with contumely. Since then I learned, accidentally, your wife is living with Fred, and still mourning your loss."

"Oh, fool, fool, to doubt her!" David cried, bitterly. "To make her the cynosure of all eyes, to make her name a subject for common scandal. I have ruined my own life and hers. It is too late to go back! too late! too late!" Swinton stood looking down with unveiled contempt upon him, and, waxing impatient, said,—

"When you can spare time from your own affairs I would like to talk to you. You know I am in an awkward fix."

David nodded.

"Well, as I have relieved your mind with regard to your wife, it is but fair you should help me. I want to lie quiet for a few days until this hue-and-cry is over."

"What have you done?" the other asked, abashedly.

"Embezzlement," and, hardened as he was, a hot flush crept into his cheeks. "It is an ugly crime, and brings an ugly punishment with it. But for Nellie I had never been in such a fix."

"What do you mean?" hotly, "How can she be concerned in this affair?"

"Why, when she jilted me I didn't care much what came to me, but soon I found consolation in piling money upon money—not always honestly got," with sullen bravado. "I worked cautiously, and not without talent, until I feared discovery, and left Switzerland in a hurry. Then I succeeded in getting an appointment in a large house in Havre; there I continued my system of appropriation and had to fly. Like a fool I came on here, where I am well known, being in the habit of travelling to and fro at short intervals. This is all I have to tell. Help me to get away, then you may return to her, and live happily ever after," and he ended with a short, mocking laugh.

"I can never go back," David said, with a look of supreme loathing at Swinton. "I have lost caste, money, and her love! Oh, man, man! Why must you envy our happiness and wreck our two lives? It would be just if justice I gave you up to the law."

"You won't do that," quickly, "for Ann's sake. Any shame falling on me would be reflected on the St. Ethelreda Pagets, your wife's best friends. And," with a glance of contempt at the slight figure, "I think I should prove best man in a struggle."

"Do not threaten," with weary scorn. "My life is not so good that I should fear to lose it, and you have nothing to fear from me. You cast yourself on my mercy, and I am not villain enough to betray you. Sit down whilst I get you something to eat."

Swinton was quite ready to obey, and watched with eager, hungry eyes whilst David spread a cloth and produced bread and cheese.

"I'm ravenous!" he said, drawing up his chair. "I've not broken my fast for forty-eight hours. I've had no time to think of eating. I scarcely knew I was hungry!"

David watched him whilst he ate and drank, and when his appetite was in a measure appeased said,—

"What do you purpose doing in the future?"

"Oh, I shall go to one of the colonies, where, no doubt, I shall do pretty well, as I shall be well provided with cash."

"Do you mean you will not make restitution?"

Swinton nodded, but did not venture to look into the cold, condemning eyes, the pale wan face of the man he despised.

"One can do nothing without money. Perhaps when I have made my pile I may think over your suggestion."

"Do you expect any good will come to you if you work with your stolen hoard?"

"Don't preach! I shall risk it, at any rate. Now, where are you going to stow me?"

"You will be quite safe here. I live among

friends, and for my sake you will be sacred to them. But I would not advise you to venture out for some days."

"Great Jove! how shall I wile away the hours!"

"I will get some books to-morrow."

"I'm not studiously inclined. But anything will be better than thinking. By the way, what are you doing at Bristol? You don't look too prosperous?"

"I am engaged at a warehouse," shortly. This man's callous regard of his sin, his assumption of superiority, filled him with such hate and such contempt that he could not wholly hide.

That night he slept on the floor, Swinton occupying the bed; and when he rose in the morning to his surprise he found his guest sleeping quietly as a little child.

He stole out, and calling Mrs. Adams, told her an old acquaintance had come to visit him. Would she kindly attend to his wants during his own absence.

"But, sir," said the good woman, "you've not had your breakfast yet!"

"No; I shall get a cup of coffee as I go along. I do not wish to disturb my—my friend. Do the best you can for him, and I will pay you on Saturday for your trouble."

He went downstairs and out into the street, walking like one in a dream. His brain was in a whirl. He could not think; he only heard a voice crying with pitiless reiteration,—

"Fool! Fool! Too late! Too late!"

Oh, why had he been so ready to doubt!—so ready to destroy with his own hands the fair palace of love and joy.

"I will go back to her," he said to his heavy heart. "I will never rest until her pardon is won! All my life shall be spent in teaching her forgetfulness of her present grief! Wife! oh, wife! soloved, so wronged! for my love and sorrow's sake you will forgive me!"

Then he glanced down at his poor clothing, his toll-worn, roughened hands, thought that now he had no gift to offer her, nothing but poverty to share with her, and his soul grew sick with anguish.

"It is too late!" he muttered. "The past is over and done with, and I am alone for all time!"

He could hardly tell how the daily duties were performed, what answers he gave to friendly greetings, or if he moved and spoke in the accustomed way. And when night came, and he plodded wearily home, such horror of the man awaiting him seized him that once he turned back, saying,—

"I cannot return. I cannot breathe in the same room with him!"

But he conquered what he was pleased to term his cowardice, and retracing his steps soon came to the home polluted now by Swinton's presence.

He found that worthy seated at the table, which was spread with such luxuries as were unknown in Plackett-court.

He turned as David entered.

"You are late; but better late than never. Come and join me."

"I should choke!" the other said, vehemently, "if I shared your meal! Do you think I forgot how it was purchased?"

Swinton scowled, but saying only, "Please yourself," attacked the savoury viands with redoubled energy. A bottle of brandy stood beside him, of which he drank freely, until at last, to David's unspeakable relief, the thick and stammering voice grew silent, and the heavy eyes closed in a drunken sleep.

This state of affairs continued for several days; and, as all mention of the swindler disappeared from the "dailies," Swinton declared the time was ripe for his departure.

"I shall go to Cape Colony," he said. "That's a pretty safe place; and it's easy to change one's name. I think I shall borrow yours. It isn't uncommon, and it sounds respectable. I shall run down to Southampton to-morrow, and there I'll get an outfit, and

make inquiries with regard to the 'outward bounds.' You'll be glad to be rid of me."

"I shall not be sorry," bluntly. "But how do you suppose you will get safely out of the city where you say you are well-known?"

"I must plan a disguise of some sort; and you will help me to carry it out," coolly. "I think I shall pass for a respectable working-man—fustian, and wear a shade over my eyes, I think; but I haven't yet decided. What are you going already? What a fool you are to work for such a pittance; but each to his taste,' and yours is peculiar!"

He watched David go slowly down the court, then, turning from the window, said, relievedly,—

"Thank Heaven! to-morrow I shall have left this wretched den and my methodistical friend behind!"

Then he summoned one of the choice spirits with which the court abounded, and engaged him in a game of cards.

That night, when David returned, Mrs. Adams met him with a pale, scared face.

"Oh, sir!" she said, hysterically, "the gentleman upstairs—your friend—"

"What?" he questioned, with dry lips, fearing to hear of Swinton's arrest.

"He was coming downstairs to let Black Mike out—they were both drunk—and he, Mr. Jones slipped and fell. The doctor says his back's broke, and he can't live many days!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"Upon her there,
Safe in his arms, there fell such pure content
As not one thought of aught in the wide world
Save him, could enter."

—Helen Mathers.

DAVID waited to hear no more. With white face and startled eyes he sprang up the stairs three at a time. He had loathed and hated Swinton, but now a great and overwhelming pity filled his heart.

The sin against himself, the dishonesty and dissipation which had made his life so shameful, were all forgotten. He could only think of this fearful and untimely end!

As he entered the room, the doctor turned to him with an expression of relief.

"I am glad you have come, Knight. This poor fellow needs you sorely. He knows the worst, and cannot face it yet."

David's face seemed to lose its homeliness with that divine pity on it.

He sat down, and took one of Swinton's hands in his, but he could say nothing, and the wretched man was first to speak.

"Upon my word," he said, with an attempt at mockery, "I believe you are sorry for me. For once the saint is genuinely concerned for the sinner!"

"Don't speak like that," David urged, gently. "You have the compassion of all who have heard of—of this terrible accident! Is there anything I can do?"

"Yes. Send him away," with a nod towards the doctor. "My time is short, and I want to talk."

His face grew, if possible, more grey in its pallor, and a groan rose to his lips, but he bravely kept it back.

With all his faults he was no coward. He was suffering untold agonies with the fortitude of a stoic.

When the doctor had taken his leave, he turned his changed face towards David.

"I know it's all up with me, and yet I can't repent a single thing I have done! I can't even pretend to be grateful to you; and yet I'm going to leave you all. I've got to start you afresh. There'll be no one to make shipwreck of your happiness this time. If only I had had your luck!"

"Do not think of these things now; and as for the money, Swinton, I cannot take it. Give me the names of those you have defrauded, and let me make restitution."

But this Swinton refused to do, saying he had not plotted and planned, risked his name and liberty, to lose all he had gained because of mandarin sentiment, and seeing that persuasions were useless David desisted in his attempt.

"Nobody knows how soon I shall go; but I should like to see Ann before the end—and Nellie. Will you wire them?"

"Yes, if you wish it; but do not ask me to meet my wife. Such a meeting would be painful to her. She surely can have no wish to see me again!"

"Wait and see; you're a perfect fool where women are concerned! Don't you know that the worse a man treats a woman the better she loves him; it is an amiable way the sex has. Now send Mrs. Adams to me, and hurry off to the telegraph office."

The message was duly sent, David including "Uncle Fred" in the urgent entreaty to "come at once," and then he devoted himself to the poor patient, who was rapidly sinking. He never left him, even to gain a little necessary rest, but tended him with a gentleness and watchfulness that would have been wonderful in a woman.

Some germs of grace still lingered in the hardened heart of the dying man, and at last this devotion from one whom he had sought to wrong so cruelly—from whom he deserved nothing but harshness and contempt—tochend him to keen remorse. He caught one of the tollworn hands in his, and lifting it to his failing lips, kissed it once in a passion of grief and gratitude, then burst into a violent flood of tears.

"Oh, memory, memory!" he groaned, "how it carries me back to the old days when I was honest as you—honest and hopeful! Oh, Heaven, what a failure my life has been—a failure and a shame! It is not true that losing Nelly I lost honesty with her! I—I had fallen when we first met!"

In vain David tried to soothe him, to stop the flow of self-reproaches; but having begun his confession he must needs make an end of it.

"I wasn't always bad," he said, in conclusion, "but evil companions, want of principle, and love of money ruined me. Perhaps she could have saved me; but I don't know. I might even have grown weary of her—possession robs a prize of its charms—at least for me!" and after a pause, in which he fought for breath, "do as you like with the notes and gold. I owe you that concession; you will find all particulars of my—my embezzlements in my pocket book."

He lay quiet for awhile, then said, in a feebler voice,—

"When Nellie comes, remain here. If I am not mistaken you will hear something to your advantage, as the newspapers say! I'm sorry, old boy, I've nothing now to leave you."

The long night wore away, the day dawned, and one after another the weary hours passed; the sun sunk slowly in the west, the sky grew pale-green and purple, whilst the stars began to appear, and the frosty air became yet keener.

"If they are coming they will be here soon," David said, lighting a lamp. "Do not talk any more now; you will want your strength in a little while."

Swinton listened with closed eyes and teeth set fast. It was not only bodily anguish which tortured him now; his heart was full of sick shame that Nellie should see him there, and know him for what he was—a common thief! Ay, there was the sting! She, who had once exalted him above all earthly good or hope of good.

There were steps on the stairs.

"They have come!" he said, gaspingly. "Let me see Nellie last," and Mrs. Adams, having received her instructions, led the girl into her own room, ushering Mr. and Mrs. Paget into the sick chamber. The latter went forward, and falling on her knees beside the bed, kissed the clammy brow, and sobbed

as though her heart would break. Mr. Paget, with suspiciously moist eyes, stood silent, looking questioningly at the fustian old figure on the opposite side of the bed, and trying vainly to catch a glimpse of the face hidden by the slouch hat pulled so low over the eyes.

Swinton saw his curiosity and smiled.—

"This is my friend and nurse. I wronged him, or tried to wrong him, as much as it is in one man's power to injure another, and yet he has not only forgiven me, but nursed me, cared for me like a brother! You knew him once, in his more prosperous days. He answered then to the name of David Knight!"

Mrs. Fred uttered a cry, and David, surprised at this sudden revelation of Swinton's, took off his hat and stood confessed.

Mrs. Fred tried to look severe, but failed utterly, whilst her lord and master grasped the young man's hand warmly, and was speechless with pleasure.

"Why did you run away? Why could you not wait for Nellie's explanation? Do you know what pain and shame you worked for her?" demanded Mrs. Fred, irritably.

"I know now—and have neither hope nor claim to forgiveness," humbly.

"Nonsense, man!" broke in Uncle Fred. "You always had too poor an opinion of yourself. Your mistake was a natural one, and Nellie will freely forget and forgive—the latter she has long since done. I'll go and prepare her for this joyful surprise."

"No, wait until you have heard my story. It is you who must tell her all," said Swinton. "Bad as I am I have yet some remnant of feeling, and I can't confess to her. You must be my ambassador. Sit near—my voice is failing me fast; and when I've made a clean breast of it I want you to send her to me in utter ignorance of David's identity. Nothing but her own words will convince him of her love and pardon. He will believe that her sense of duty compels her to receive him again as 'her husband.'"

So it was agreed to do as the dying man desired, and in a few words he told his own story, Mrs. Fred listening with a growing horror she vainly tried to conceal, and when it was ended she burst into tears.

"Swinton, I wish you had not told me these things. I would have liked to keep some pleasant memory of you when you are gone."

He moved his head wearily.

"I knew I should disgust you. I'm a bad lot, but I'm doing the best thing possible under the circumstances. I'm dying as fast as I can. Now, if you please, leave us, and send Nellie here."

In a little while the girl came. She had been crying with sorrow at his fall from honour and rectitude, and pity of his tragic end. She could not forget that once she had loved this poor wretch, and invested him with every manly attribute.

He lifted his dim eyes to her sweet face.

"Ah, Nellie!" he said, "you have nothing but scorn for me now, and Heaven knows I richly deserve it."

She glanced at David, whose heart beat loud and fast. The dear face he saw now after such weary, weary months was paler than it should be, the sweet mouth mournful, the dark eyes heavy with long-sustained woe. Swinton said,—

"You may speak freely, Nellie; this is my nurse," and she wondered a little at the other's uncouth behaviour. He had neither spoken nor removed his hat since her entrance.

"Nellie," said the faint voice, "you are aware now what manner of man I am. You were right to cling to David—he, at least, loved you purely and whole-heartedly."

"Yes," she answered, trembling; "but—but I cannot bear to speak of these things now. Since he went away I have grown weak as a child."

"Do you think he still lives?"

"Heaven forbid that he should die away and at enmity with me," she cried, wildly.

"Do you mean you forgive his desertion and doubt of you?"

"I have nothing to forgive—I, who deceived him, who promised solemnly to love him when I had no love to give. But, Swinton, day by day his goodness and devotion touched me more keenly, until, all unknown to myself, I loved him—yes, loved him first and best—as never had I loved you."

"And yet he could leave you, a prey to misery, a subject for scandal?"

"He was mad with his woes—mad to find me less than he believed me. So he voluntarily went into poverty, leaving me all he had—setting me free, who did not wish for freedom;" and here she broke down, and but for Swinton's expressive look David would at once have declared himself.

"Do you mean you love him still, Nellie?" he questioned. "And in spite of all?"

She looked at him in a sort of amaze that he should doubt this, and answered,—

"I could not change if I would. I love him with all my soul and all my breath."

"And what if I have news of him for you? What if I tell you that he still lives, loving and blessing you? Condemning himself, but never you; that though fallen from his former position—poor, friendless—his true heart has never changed, or his nature been warped with his many trials?"

"Tell me all, that I may go to him, pleading pardon and love; that I may show him my contrition, and teach him to believe in me once more."

"He does that already, Nellie!" said David, rising suddenly.

She gave one wild cry of rapture as she saw him standing before her, and flew to his side.

"David! David!" she sobbed, "forgive me, and take me back again! Oh! my heart will burst with its load of joy!"

He held her fast whilst he kissed her sweet lips again and again, and in his heart he was thanking Heaven for the joy of this one supreme moment.

The last hour had come. Swinton was drawing near now to the dark river; already the death-dew was on his brow, and his eyes were fast glazing. Still he did not loose his hold on Nellie's hand, and now bending over him, she said,—

"Pray with me, Swinton."

"It is too late," he groaned; but she urged with piteous reiteration "Pray," and with tears in her eyes, began that petition which comprises all our wants—The Lord's Prayer.

The failing lips moved once or twice, and when Nellie had reached the words "Forgive us our trespasses" they cried aloud in anguish and dread "Forgive," and then were silent for evermore. And who shall dare affirm that even at that eleventh hour the sinner was not pardoned?

Nellie and David never returned to Camford, both having a morbid dread of meeting old acquaintances; but with the money Nellie had banked, and some assistance from "Uncle Fred," David purchased a small business at Gloucester, and after much grief and privation prosperity came to him, and with prosperity joy; and Nellie is wont to declare that in all England there is no happier wife than she; no nobler, fonder husband than the man she once had well-nigh loathed.

[THE END.]

THE every-day cares and duties which men call drudgery are the weights and counterpoises of the clock of time, giving its pendulum a true vibration, and its hands a regular motion; and when they cease to hang upon the wheels, the pendulum no longer swings, the hands no longer move, the clock stands still.

FACETIA.

AN old Greenland seaman said he could really believe that crocodiles shed tears, for he had often seen whale's blubber.

YOUNG SNOW: "Do you know, Miss Fairly, that song you have just sung always carries me away." Miss Fairly (with a fervent sigh): "Oh, how I wish it would!"

"I DON'T believe it's any use to vaccinate for the small-pox," said a man, "for I had a child vaccinated, and in less than a week he fell out of a window and was killed."

WHEN a man is dismissed from employment he always has a good deal to say against his late employers. A man, in fact, is like a gun. He makes a great noise when he is discharged.

MAUDE (before the laughing hyena's cage)—"How mean! Here we've been twenty minutes and the hyenas hasn't laughed once!" Ella—"Strange, and he's been eying your new hat, too!"

"It takes a year, my dear," said an old lady to a bride of a couple of months who was anxious about her husband's affection, "to know a man—and then you know nothing about him."

"You are much taller than you were a year ago," said a gentleman to a friend. "Yes: I have reformed; that makes me taller." "And how is that?" "Well, as I have reformed I have become necessarily more upright."

"CAN you tell me," asked a pundit, "why a conundrum that nobody can guess is like the ghost?" "Shall I tell you now or next month?" "Now, if you please." "Well, sir, sooner or later, everybody must give it up."

An iron horse on one of our principal railways having been adorned with the title, "I still live," a wag, noticing the inscription, remarked: "That is what the passengers should be labelled at the end of their journey."

RANGER, have you a half crown that you don't want?" "Why, certainly. Here it is." The next day: "Say, Ranger, that half crown you gave me was a wrong un." "Yes, Bromley. You asked me if I had a half crown that I didn't want."

"WHEN were the Pyramids of Egypt discovered?" asked the teacher. "In the Middle Ages," replied the scholar at the foot of the class. "What do you mean by the Middle Ages?" further questioned the pedagogue. "Why, the Pyramidal Ages!" answered the scholar.

GENEROSITY.—A young gentleman recently found himself in the company of three young ladies, and generously divided an orange between them. "You will rob yourself," exclaimed one of the damsels. "Not at all," replied the innocent; "I have three or four more in my pockets."

"DEAR me!" exclaimed Stiggins, "that new surgeon gave Squantum's boy a new lip from the child's own cheek. What a painful operation it must have been?" "I've had a pair of lips taken from my cheek more than once," replied Mrs. Stiggins, "and it wasn't a painful operation at all."

"HALF of this bottle of wine is gone. It seems to me that you should be able to stand the temptation," said Judge Pennybunker to his coloured servant. "Dat ar am easier said dan done, boss." "At any rate, you should come out like a man, and say that you stole the wine." "Dat ar am easier done dan said, boss."—*American Paper.*

OCULAR EVIDENCE.—Pension Commissioner: "You say you were literally pierced with bullets. I don't see how it was possible for you to survive the riddling. Have you any witnesses who can certify to the exact number of bullets that entered your body?" Applicant: "Yes, sir. After the battle the chest-protector which I had worn was in this terrible and convincing condition." (And he exhibited a well-worn plaster, amid excited silence.)

SOCIETY.

THE Prince of Wales is still in Austria, being fitted and entertained by Francis Joseph. His Royal Highness has been seen in various well-known places of resort, where life in all its splendour and "rapidity" is to be witnessed.

THANKS to the military character of the Prince of Wales' visit to Vienna, his proceeding in the Austrian capital were very different to those which mark his occasional flying visits to that city. As a rule he occupies a suite of rooms at the Grand Hotel, and goes to the Embassy as little as possible, for the Prussian etiquette of Lady Paget and her mania for long descents and blue blood are to H.R.H. an abomination of abominations. On ordinary occasions he looks in on Princess Metternich, who has always some choice bit of gossip or racy anecdote wherewithal to regale him; lounge in the Ring, walks the Graben in a pot hat and the most *négligé* of morning costumes, and has for his constant companion Count Tassilo Festetics, on whose Hungarian estates our future one has enjoyed many a good day's sport.

MARGHERITA, the "Lily of Savoy," was the handsomest, by far, of all those queenly figures that gathered round the Duke d'Aosta and his bride at the altar. She wore white satin covered with lace even more costly than what she had presented to her niece, a train of grenat red, with rich gold embroideries, and a diadem and parure of pearls and diamonds, the necklace being formed of huge pearls. Even the Queen of Portugal's magnificent jewellery and cream-coloured lace dress with blue velvet train in no wise eclipsed the splendours of her sister-in-law. The bride was nowhere, and Clotilde looked positively dowdy beside the Italian Queen. And when the costumes had all been changed, and the grandees took their places on the platform during the floral *fête* later on, it was Margherita again who attracted all eyes, in her toilette of rich heliotrope velvet. By this time, however, the bride had some colour in her cheeks, and animation in her looks and gestures; and her dress of salmon-pink satin suited her style of face better than the bridal white had done.

SOCIETY belles, says *Modern Society*, have taken to tights, and have discovered that they give a peculiar support to the entire frame which makes the wearer capable of emulating the wonderful feats of their sisters on the stage, whose normal state is that of being clothed in these clinging and elastic garments. "How divinely you waltz to-night!" said a masher to his mate, as they spun around the ballroom together; "you seem as light as air." "And shall I tell you why?" softly confided his partner, when the panting couple had sunk down upon a settee. Then in gentle accents, and taking care not to tread upon the British Matron's toes more than she could possibly help, the fair one broke it to him that she was clothed in tights. The murder being out, she disconcerted quite glibly upon the subject, and finished by saying that there is a springy, lifting, buoyant, all-there sensation about tights that is positively delicious. No doubt she was right.

LORD FITZWILLIAM, whose golden wedding was celebrated the other day, is a very fine representative of the virtues of his class, and if all the peers resembled him in character and career we should not hear so much about the need for reforming the House of Lords. In spite of occasional friction with his colliers, caused by faults on both sides, Lord Fitzwilliam has contrived to retain throughout his life a singular popularity among his neighbours.

The official announcement of the betrothal of the Grand Duke Paul, youngest brother of the Czar, to the eldest daughter of the King of the Hellenes, is to be made during the stay of His Imperial Highness at Athens.

STATISTICS.

THERE are 358,670 registered dogs in Ireland. Of this number 25,610 are in towns, and the remainder in farming districts.

POPULATION OF RUSSIA.—Government statistics recently published place the population of the Russian empire at 108,787,235, of which 81,725,185 are in Russia proper, 10,136,725 are in the other provinces of Russia in Europe, and 16,925,325 in Asiatic Russia. St. Petersburg is the most populous city, with a total of 861,303. The population of Moscow is 753,469, of Warsaw 454,293, and of Odessa 240,000.

THE HEART.—A mathematician has recently been at work upon the human heart. His calculation is a curious one, and gives the work of the heart in miles and beats. It is based upon the presumption that the pulsation of the cardiac organ are sixty-nine each minute, and the assumption that the force of each pulsation is nine feet. Computed thus, according to his figures, the mileage of the blood through the body might be taken as 207 yards per minute, 7 miles per hour, 168 miles per day, 61,320 per year, or 4,292,400 in a lifetime of three score years and ten. The number of beats of the heart in the same long life would reach the grand total of 2,538,848,000.

GEMS.

A YEAR of pleasure passes like a fleeting breeze, but a moment of sorrow seems an age of pain.

WEALTH is a weak anchor, and glory cannot support a man; this is the law of God, that virtue only is firm, and cannot be shaken by a tempest.

As nothing truly valuable can be attained without industry, so there can be no persevering industry without a deep sense of the great value of time.

It is in vain for you to expect, it is imprudent for you to ask, of God, forgiveness on your own behalf if you refuse to exercise this forgiving temper with respect to others.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SODA CAKES.—Ingredients: Half a pound of flour, two ounces of butter, three ounces of sugar, one ounce of candied peel, grated rind of a lemon, one whole egg. If necessary, a little milk, half a teaspoonful of carbonate of soda. Rub the butter well into the flour, add the sugar, peel, lemon-rind, and soda. Mix, with the egg well beaten, and, if necessary, a little milk. The mixture must be very stiff. Put it in little rough heaps on a greased baker's-tin. Bake in a quick oven for fifteen minutes.

FRUIT SAUCE.—This is made of apples and peaches mixed, and of cranberries. Apples are either stewed or baked, and then mashed through a colander. First pare them and remove the seeds. To one pint, add one tablespoonful of butter and a pound of sugar. Acid apples are the best. If made of dried apples and peaches, take equal quantities of each; soak them for six hours, and then stew them; sweeten to taste, and add a little lemon to give them an acid taste. Cranberries are first washed and picked, and then put on to stew with enough water to cover them; let them stew until the skins crack and they begin to thicken; sweeten them to taste and let them get cold. They are better if made into a jelly; you can make them jelly, if you put the berries to stew with enough water to cover them. When the skins crack, strain them, and, to each pint of juice, put one pound of brown sugar; let it cook until it jellies, then put it into china moulds to cool; serve with meats.

MISCELLANEOUS.

If you could once make up your mind, in the fear of God, never to undertake more work of any sort than you can carry on calmly, quietly, without hurry or flurry, and the instant you feel yourself growing nervous, and like one out of breath, would stop and take breath, you would find this common-sense rule doing for you what no prayers or tears could ever accomplish.

CIGARETTE SMOKING.—The soothing weed has many scientific advocates, but others contend that it is injurious to young and old alike, but, in any case, it is injurious to undeveloped boys. The constant use of cigarettes is even worse than tobacco in other forms, and soon produces a chain of nervous disorders that arrests digestion, disturbs the action of the heart, causes dizziness and loss of memory, and stunts natural growth. The appetite grows till it becomes a habitual vice in its effects as the opium or alcohol habit; but it is more likely to be acquired by the young than either of these. Parents should do everything in their power to prevent their boys from using tobacco, for it is a fact well known to physicians that many diseases can be traced directly to the premature and excessive use of this narcotic. Thousands of men would gladly discontinue its use, but they have become so enslaved by it that they cannot do so. The only safety is to prevent the young from acquiring the habit.

HEMP ROPE.—A German paper, in an article on the present methods of rope manufacture from hemp and the determination of the different qualities and probable strength simply from the appearance, lays down the following rules: A good hemp rope is hard, but pliant, yellowish or greenish grey in colour, with a certain silvery or pearly lustre. A dark or blackish colour indicates that the hemp has suffered from fermentation in the process of curing, and brown spots show that the rope was spun while fibres were damp, and is consequently weak and soft in those places. Again, sometimes a rope is made with inferior hemp on the inside, covered with yarns of good material—a fraud, however, which may be detected by dissecting a portion of the rope, or, in practiced hands, by its behaviour in use. Other inferior ropes are made with short fibres, or with strands of unequal strength, or unevenly spun, the rope in the first case appearing woolly, on account of the number of ends of fibres projecting, and in the latter case the irregularity of manufacture is evident on inspection by any good judge.

AN INGENIOUS CORRESPONDENCE.—A correspondence with hair was once attempted between a notorious Parisian thief in *durance vile* and his comrades outside. A letter was sent to the prisoner from his sweetheart, containing merely a lock of hair wrapped in the leaf of a book. The jailer did not consider the souvenir important enough to be delivered, but in a few days there came a similar enclosure, and yet another. This aroused suspicion, and the governor took the matter in hand. He examined the leaf of the book; it was that of a common novel, twenty-six lines on a page. Then he studied the hair and noticed the small quantity of the gift. Counting the hairs he found them of unequal length and twenty-six in number, the same as the lines on the page. Struck with the coincidence, he laid the hairs along the lines on the page which they respectively reached, beginning at the top with the smallest hair. After some trouble he found that the end of each hair pointed to a different letter, and that these letters combined formed a slang sentence, which informed the prisoner that his friends were on the watch, and that the next time he left the prison to be examined an attempt would be made to rescue him. The governor made his plans accordingly. The attempt was made, but the rescuers fell into their own trap.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. K.—The Royal George was lost August 29, 1782.

L. T.—"The White Lady of Avenal" was a tutelary spirit protecting a noble but unfortunate family in Scott's novel, "The Monastery."

N. M.—What you say is true. We have all some mission, and the power given us to accomplish it. The great art of life consists in making the most of your opportunities.

W. N.—We should imagine you to be young—under twenty—almost self-educated, conscientious, and with rather a peculiar mingling of practical good sense and romance in your nature.

L. M.—Press the "blackheads" out with the hollow end of a watch key, and rub the skin occasionally with the tips of the fingers wet in warm water tinctured with ammonia, camphor, or alcohol.

ENQUIRER.—

"For Art may err, but Nature cannot miss."

The quotation composes line 452 of Dryden's poem entitled "The Cock and Fox."

RHODA.—You can make your round moon-face seem longer by parting your hair in the middle and bringing it down upon either temple plainly, or slightly waved. Wear a poke hat or pointed bonnet.

B. R. K.—You are not too plump. A hundred and thirty-five is a good weight. A very proper way to keep from getting too fat is to stir around, help your mamma keep house, and use your hoe in the garden and flower-beds.

T. T.—Navy-blue, tan, light-brown, or dark-grey relieved with scarlet or crimson are colours that harmonize with your dark rosy skin. For evening, salmon-pink, strawberry and cream, earth and pale-tan would be becoming.

M. E. T.—Never had a lover, you say? All the better. You haven't frittered away your affections, and can pour them on the right fellow when he comes. He'll come after awhile. Don't fret about him, but make yourself as sweet and smart as possible for him when he does come.

A. N.—1. Fond of one's wife. 2. Where the habits, associations, education and temperament of one person are in active and lasting opposition to those of another person, there may be said to be a "deep-seated incompatibility" between the two persons. 3. Feigning, or hiding under a false appearance.

F. N.—Astolat, to which Tennyson makes the home of his "Lily Maid"—Elaine is Guildford in Surrey—the most beautiful county in England. "Abel Shuffebottom" was a name assumed by that prolific English writer and poet, Robert Southey. He was the poet laureate of England in Byron's time. "Annabel Lee" was written by Edgar Poe, and refers to his lovely child-wife, Virginia, who married him when she was fifteen and died so young.

C. H. H.—Diamonds are often tinted yellow, pale-blue, or green. These are not of the finest water. The largest pair of match diamonds in the world—called Venus and Apollo—are of a greenish-yellow shade. They weigh together fifty-two and a half carats. If they were pure white, or bluish-white even, their cost would be enormous; now they are valued at only two thousand pounds. They belonged to the Sultan of Turkey, who sold them in order to preserve peace in his realm.

G. H.—A letter should always be answered, and since your friend took no notice of yours, she would have no right to complain if you broke off her acquaintance altogether. If you care much for her, and think that there may be some misunderstanding on her part, you might write a few kind lines asking for an explanation of her silence. It is just possible that she may have written, and that her letter may have failed to reach you. Your writing is very good for a girl of fourteen.

BLUE-EYED MAID asks if it is proper for a gentleman to pay for the hire of a piano in order that a young girl of fourteen (presumably Blue-eyed Maid herself) may take lessons in music. If the gentleman is a trusted friend of the young lady's family, and he hires the piano with their knowledge and consent, it may be a proper proceeding. It is not well for a young woman to put herself under pecuniary obligations to any man; but circumstances may make it necessary and right. Your hair is red-gold, and accords well with your pearl-white skin, carolean-blue eyes, and pink cheeks. Your style is what is called the strawberry blonde. Your writing shows a vivacious, impulsive temperament, with the faults of haste and carelessness.

ATLANTA.—Your name may be from Atlanta, the mythological island which contained the Elysian Fields, or from Atlas, the King of Mauretania, in Africa, who bore the weight of the world upon his shoulders; or from Atalanta, the beautiful princess, who could outstrip in speed every man in her father's court. The king gave a grand running match or tourney, in which the princes from far and near came to contest with the fair Atalanta in fleet-footedness, the prize being her hand. She was won by a shrewd knight, who tossed a golden apple ahead of her as they ran. She could not resist the temptation to stop to pick it up, and so lost the race and her maiden freedom. If this fleet princess was the namesake of your go-ahead city, then it has proved prophetic. She outstrips most of her sister cities of the Southern United States; but let her beware of imitating Atalanta's greed for gold, and, in caring too much for getting rich and material progress, lose sight of the higher progress in culture and refinement.

G. H. H.—Woollens and flannels are worn by those exposed to heat because they absorb perspiration readily.

BRENDA.—The recitation is well-known, and very cleverly written. It is by an American author. It is given in some of the modern "Reciters"; a good bookseller could get it for you.

G. G.—To develop the mare's speed you will have to send her where there is an exercising track or good roads, and where there are facilities for putting her under regular training. To get rid of the wind-galls obtain the services of a veterinary surgeon.

A. D.—No, it is not always necessary. If the two are very intimate, and the gentleman calls frequently, the formality may be dispensed with. If the young lady does not desire a gentleman with whom she is not intimately acquainted to call, she has simply to omit the invitation.

E. C. A.—You can call there if the father has not forbidden you the house. Should he do so, it would of course be improper for you to enter his dwelling, and you must await the development of circumstances. If the young lady loves you, you can afford to be very self-sacrificing and conciliatory.

A WORRIED ONE.—1. It seems to us that you want exercise in the open air as much as possible and a generous diet, also cheerful society. Your headaches are probably due to nervousness, and if so, a course of bromide of potassium taken under the direction of a doctor would perhaps relieve you, but it is very difficult to advise in such matters from correspondence only. 2. The best and simplest dentifrice is prepared chalk.

MY BONNY BRIDE.

My love is like the day-light,
So warm and bright and free;
Like sunshine in her sweet presence,
Brings joy and hope to me.

My love is like the moonlight,
So calm and pure and grand;
My soul a willing captive
Submits to her command.

My love is like the midnight,
Mysterious and deep,
With subtle power beguiling
All weariness to sleep.

My daylight, moonlight, midnight,
Queen of my heart's desire!
Before my goddess' altar,
I light love's mystic fire.

And lay my gifts upon it,
The love of all my life,
My hope, faith, joy, ambition,
A heart that claims thee, wife.

Accept the offering, prithee,
My soul's most clear delight;
Be thou love's chosen priestess,
My bonny bride, to-night.

A. K.

NOM DE PLUME.—1. It will not increase it. Wait till you are a man. 2. To clean a black cloth coat take liquid ammonia diluted with a third of its bulk of water and sponge carefully all over, taking care to apply several times to the worst parts. 3. It is very unformed, and is probably your character.

ALBERT.—There is very good reason to believe Egypt was the first country in which the art of medicine was cultivated with any degree of success, the office of the priest and the physician being probably combined in the same person. In the writings of Moses there are various allusions to the practice of medicine among the Jews, especially with reference to the treatment of leprosy. The priests were the physicians, and their treatment mainly aimed at promoting cleanliness and preventing contagion.

A. A.—It is well known that the higher one ascends the rarer the atmosphere grows. As the atmosphere becomes rarer its power of absorbing solar heat is lowered. At some unknown distance from the earth it becomes so rare as to be identical with the "ether" or the fluid which fills the spaces between the heavenly bodies, which spaces are inconceivably cold. On the other hand, the atmosphere is densest next the earth's surface, and on that account it has there its greatest capacity for absorbing rays of solar heat; consequently, heat is greater at the surface of the earth than at any place above in the atmosphere.

OFFENDED.—We answer every letter sent to the office unless of such a character that it is unworthy of reply, and cannot understand how your previous communications could have been overlooked. Possibly you may have not seen the answer. We will endeavour to please you now to the best of our power. 1. Sidney is a surname; Royal means "Kinglike"; Ronald "powerful"; Gladys is the Welsh form of Claudia, and means "closed"; Opal "a gem"; Irene is Greek, and means "peace"; it is pronounced as if spelt Irene. 2. Precise and neat, but frotful, and rather self-opinionated. 3. Yes. 4. As you will see by the notice at the foot of the last column of this page, we do not undertake to return rejected manuscripts. 4. Send the story by all means, and we will tell you within a month whether it is suitable for this journal or not. Please put your name and address on the first page of the manuscript, and only write on one side of the paper.

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MUSEUM

L. V.—1. An engagement ring is not considered imperative. 2. The Christian names and the date of betrothal are enough.

JANE.—If your lover is well acquainted with the families of your pupils, it is not improper for him to call at the conclusion of the lessons to escort you home.

ROSE.—Under the circumstances which you mention, the lady generally does not attend the entertainment. If she has reason to believe that the slight to her fiancé is intentional, she certainly does not attend.

CRISSEY.—You should not permit the gentleman to frequently walk home with you, unless the streets are unsafe, or for some good reason you need an escort, and your betrothed is unable to be present. If, however, you accept the gentleman's escort, it is rude to desert him in the street for another gentleman. If your betrothed meets you at the door of the shop, you should accept his company instead of the other gentleman's.

HOMEO.—1. According to the "Language of Flowers," the hop signifies injustice; the rose geranium, preference; apple geranium, present preference; fish geranium, disappointed expectation; nutmeg geranium, an unexpected meeting; scarlet geranium, comforting; pennyroyal, flee away. 2. Write a letter to the young gentleman, expressing your pleasure in the possession of his photograph. 3. Spelling and grammatical construction are both satisfactory, but writing will admit of improvement.

R. H. H.—wishes to become an architect, and would like to know how to prepare himself before going into an office. The study of geometry—of lines and proportions—is all important as a preparation; also a knowledge of drawing. Practise drawing constantly, and try to study proportion, both in nature and in art. The study of a fine symmetrical building, or of a fine tree is a good one. A new beginner gets no salary at first—it is only when he can make himself useful that he receives anything for his work. It is the same in every trade or profession.

R. R.—The best thing for you to do, for the purpose of carrying out your idea of learning to speak and write German, French, Spanish and Italian, would be to set energetically to work under a competent teacher, and master the rudiments of those languages as soon as possible. You should also continue your daily practical study of them, in an industrious and practical manner, and not waste your time on impractical theories and dreams of a "universal language." The new-fangled teachers who talk so glibly of the "philosophy of speech" and like emptinesses, never make good linguists of their pupils. Select for your teacher some thorough old fellow, who believes in nothing but downright hard work, and who deals in no nonsense, and you will soon find yourself making satisfactory progress.

F. P.—When Count d'Orsay died, in 1852, the *Times*, in its obituary notices of him, said he was beyond all comparison the best bred man in Europe, and stated, as proofs of this, that at a ball, party, or other fashionable assemblage, where his society was sought by the most distinguished personages, he would devote himself to the unnoticed one, to the greenhorns, to the awkward men and women, who did not know what to do with themselves; and by his exquisite tact would make them feel at home, and find them partners to dance with, and so manage affairs that they would be astonished at their own social capabilities, and wonder how things could have got on so satisfactorily if they had unfortunately been absent. This description of Count d'Orsay gives one a clear perception of the meaning of the term well-bred.

L. M. H.—St. Peter's Church, called by Gibbon "the most glorious structure that has ever been applied to the use of religion," was begun in 1450 by Pope Nicholas V. The work of building progressed slowly. According to the designs of Bramante, a noted architect, who superintended the building under Pope Julius II., the church was to be built in the form of a Latin cross. In 1520 the plans were modified so as to admit of the shaping of the structure in the form of a Greek cross. A later architect returned to Bramante's plan, but the work was soon entrusted to Michael Angelo, who changed the plans again, preferring the design of a Greek cross. In 1605 Pope Paul V. changed the ground plan to the Latin cross formation. The nave of the church was finished in 1612, and the facade and portico in 1614. The church was dedicated by Pope Urban VIII. in 1626, one hundred and seventy-six years after the beginning of the foundation. Various minor alterations and additions have since that year been made.

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